

長月達平

The author Tappei Nagatsuki

ILLUSTRATION 大塚真一郎

Shinichirou Otsuka

"The only ability I got in a different world: Returns by Death."
I die again, and again, to save her.

Arc
4

Re:ゼロ

Re: Life in a different world from zero

から始める異世界生活

Web Novel Edition

Translated by
TranslationChicken
SummaryAnon
DiscountAnon



Manifesto

Hello, this is Phantaminum. This project was motivated by my dissatisfaction at currently existing compilations of the Web Novel translations, namely lack of proofreading, size, and lack of standardization in formatting and naming conventions. This should make it easier to search for information. I have also decided to add colored Light Novel illustrations (with sources) whenever applicable and available (do note that because of the changes from Light Novel to Web Novel, some will be missing). You may find a list of all volumes I have already finished, or plan to work on, at the [final chapter of this document](#).

This document is a compilation of Re: Zero Web Novel chapters that correspond to post-Season 1 content in Volume 9, as well as all Chapters of Web Novel Arc 4, titled “**The Everlasting Contract**”, which were adapted in Light Novel Volumes 10 through 15. Sources are as follows:

- **SummaryAnon, hosted at Witch Cult Translations ([website](#))** - Arc 3 Interlude I, Fragment, Arc 4 Chapters 111 to 130, Interludes and Appendix, One Day II Chapters 1 to 6 & Final, and double-checking for TranslationChicken’s translations;
- **TranslationChicken ([website](#))** - Arc 3 Interludes II and II, Arc 4 Special Intermission, Chapters 1 to 110.
- **DiscountAnon/Nanashi-tan, hosted at Witch Cult Translations ([website](#))** - One Day II Special Parts 1 and 2.

The original translations have been proofread, edited and reformatted by myself, on top of whatever original editing and proofreading work was done by both SummaryAnon, TranslationChicken and DiscountAnon. This means that the formatting should remain consistent no matter which source is used.

I have tried to follow naming conventions present in the Light Novel as much as possible, only diverging when community-given names differed greatly. I have also used bits and pieces of SummaryAnon’s translation to double-check some bits here and there by TranslationChicken. I have also tried to conserve as much of the original author notes by SummaryAnon, TranslationChicken and DiscountAnon as much as possible.

As a fun quirk, I have done something which I admit is probably not consensual: to flip the languages whenever someone speaks what is colloquially coined as English. This means, that in the case where the story uses English, where possible, Japanese will be written as Romaji (Japanese in Latin script). When

this happens, a note was added with the original expression (and its translation), and the new expression that was converted to Romaji. Basically, I made everyone using Engrish look like weeaboos.

I hope you enjoy this as much as I did. If you have anything to point out, I'm often lurking in pretty much every Re: Zero discussion site, be it the Reddit Discord Server, the Subreddit, or 4chan's /a/ board. Alternatively, feel free to use [this document](#) to suggest corrections or other changes.

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Web Novel Volume 10



Arc 3 Interlude I - Scene on a Dragon Carriage

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 9, Interlude “A Brief Moment in a Dragon Carriage”

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by SummaryAnon — [Complete](#)

The dragon carriage rattles along quietly as it continues down the highway.

Protected by its blessing, those inside the carriage feel barely any effect from the wind. Subaru leans back and leaves himself to the silence, thinking about how this is the first time he has ever ridden calmly on a carriage before.

The first time, when heading from Roswaal's mansion to the Royal Capital, was supposed to be the most at ease. But that one turned into something horrible halfway through thanks to Subaru's own screwup, and in the end there was no room to feel any ease at all. But there's several things he only managed to pull off because he had that experience, so he can't exactly call it a bad one.

And all the ones from the second time on were heading from the Capital to Roswaal's. Since those trips all happened due to the Witch Cult, there's really no way he could've felt relaxed and calm during any of them. Thus, this is Subaru's first time riding a carriage without any sense of panic or haste.

Subaru: “Say... Petra, isn't this kinda close?”

Petra: “No? Is there some problem, Subaru?”

Looking up at Subaru, with her reddish-brown hair swaying, is Petra. She has been holding Subaru's hand ever since the carriage took off, sitting on his left, huddled up close against him. Subaru had first thought it was because she was scared what with all that had happened, but with how she's persistently been smiling so brightly and holding his hand, it's almost as if...

Subaru: “Feel like a dad. My supposedly-absent paternal instincts, now, are bubbling up from within me...!”

Petra: “It’s not fair how you’ve been all about the lady. Shouldn’t it be okay? You said there’s still time until we reach the city.”

Emilia: “Petra. What we were doing before was, erm, something a lot different. Look, me and Subaru were having a talk that we needed to have, which was sooo important. I wasn’t trying to keep him to myself.”

Petra: “Hmmpf. I’m never ever gonna lose to you, Miss.”

Says Emilia timidly, and says Petra back intimidatingly. Subaru can’t quite get a grasp on the situation but going off what she’s saying and how she’s acting, it doesn’t seem like Petra dislikes Emilia or anything. It’s probably just a result of his playful relationship with Petra. But being that Emilia is not used to children, her concern is nothing to laugh about.

Subaru: “Don’t take what she says too seriously, Emilia-tan. Things kids say, y’know? You gotta smile, grin, *sourire* back and ignore most of it.”

Emilia: “I couldn’t be such a charlatan, just because I’m talking with someone young.”

Subaru: “Who says charlatan anymore?”

Emilia: “Mmpf, you’re teasing me like that again.”

Emilia pouts, dissatisfied, and Subaru gives an easy apology while his face breaks into a smile. Petra tugs Subaru’s sleeve disapprovingly, indicating that she also must get her attention.

Seated between two beautiful girls, Subaru has been blessed with an uncommon happening for Subaru. With one girl being in love confession standby mode, and the other one being worth having some expectations for in three years’ time—but really.

—Right now, Subaru’s carriage is headed from Lifaus Highway to the Royal Capital.

This carriage, which is not the one that had been installed with the bomb, is being driven by one of the youths of Arlam Village’s young men’s brigade. Inside are Subaru and Emilia, and the children as well.

At first the everybody had given their quiet consideration by leaving Subaru and Emilia to themselves, but then Petra happily shoved herself in and now here we are.

Complaining to children for intruding on together time was of course something Subaru would not quite do, but that said Petra's incursion did have its benefits.

After all, he only just got done saying a bunch of embarrassing stuff to Emilia. He gave the on-confession-response-standby-mode Emilia that smooth "I'll wait", but the flame of love is still blazing in his chest with combustive ferocity. Couple that with the achievement he felt about getting here, and all breaks are off.

Worst case, he'd end up pre-emptively demanding something more than a lap pillow.

Subaru: "Ah man, that really was pretty risky there. Acting that cool about things and then that, hell that'd be mortifying."

Petra: "What would?"

Subaru: "Just talking about how you saved me, Petra. Ah, that's right, you kept your promise not to leave Emilia-tan alone. You're amazing, amazing."

Petra: "Ehehehee."

Subaru gently pats Petra's hair as he gives his double thanks. If Petra and the other kids had let go of Emilia's hands, she might have pushed herself again and gotten hurt. That that hadn't happened, and that all of Subaru's toiling had procured the results he wanted, was unmistakably thanks to everybody, including Petra's, help. Seriously, blessed. Too blessed.

Subaru: "There's so many people I have to thank once this's calmed down..."

Crusch, Ferris, and Wilhelm from Crusch's faction. LOathe to admit it but Julius, and the members of Iron Fang from Anastasia's faction. Must speak to barely memorable Russel too, and make good on that promise to give him the cellphone.

Kinda inexcusable that that exchange would end in Russel being duped, but considering the happiness Subaru had gained as a result, it was better to ignore that and put it aside as something trivial. Sorry Russel.

Subaru: "There's a mountain of things I gotta think over, too..."

First, he absolutely has to look into what Roswaal was doing this whole time. And he probably needs to discuss with Crusch and Anastasia as to how to divvy things up from the White Whale and Sloth fights. Especially regarding the White Whale. If what Crusch said can be believed, Subaru was in position to claim a fraction of the glory.

It wasn't that he was lusting for prestige, but if he — being part of Emilia's faction — could get even some slight fame, that would surely help Emilia. You could call it shameless, but Subaru would rather be proactive here.

And then after sorting out the immediate affairs, there's securing Arlam Village and getting things in order there. The future looks laden with difficulties.

—And, before addressing any of that, there is still one mountain that Subaru has to scale.

Subaru: “Uhm, err, Emilia-tan... I have something, extremely important to tell you.”

Emilia: “Mmhm, whaaat is it?”

Emilia twines her fingers in her silver hair as she turns to face Subaru properly, her amethyst eyes full of trust. Every time Subaru sees that light in her eyes, he can feel the success that his own actions have brought. Can feel it, but just how will Emilia respond to what he is about to tell her? Just thinking about it is honestly terrifying.

Subaru is going to tell Emilia about an unavoidable issue — That is, of course, about Rem.

If we're going back to the topic of who Subaru's giving his thanks to, there is unmistakably no one who saved Subaru as much as Rem. Her intense love and devotion mended Subaru's broken spirit and restored his will to stand up and challenge fate.

If she hadn't been there then, Subaru would not be standing here now. Without her presence, he never would have escaped from the hell called surrender. When Subaru was most in suffering, in pain, and hopeless, Rem was the one who stood with him and supported him. Was it truly so strange that Subaru felt intense love for this girl?

Until now, Subaru had wholeheartedly believed that his feelings would only be devoted to one single person. And in truth, there was only one sweetheart in the world out there for Subaru, and that was Emilia.

However, without any change in his feelings towards Emilia, Rem's presence had evoked something of identical size inside Subaru's heart. So, Subaru had decided. It might be tasteless but being that he can't abandon his love for either of them...

— He will take both Rem and Emilia.

Rem had already permitted him to have such an unseemly idea. The remaining problem is persuading Emilia, and although Rem proposed that they convince her together...

Subaru: "If I keep relying on Rem even for that, I'm really crossing the limit for awful."

Even if opportunity comes to bring Rem in so that she can contribute to the talk, Subaru's the one with the responsibility to first broach the topic. He is trying to get two girls to love him, so this is the minimum tier of hurdle he needs to cross.

Subaru takes a breath, his heartbeat slamming in his chest, as he considers what to say. He looks at Emilia. She's staring at him. Mega cute.

Subaru: "This's something incredibly hard to say, but I want you to listen. Of course, I'm sure we'll have to tell her sister at some point too, but... first, to Emilia-tan."

Emilia: "...Mhm?"

Emilia looks perplexed at Subaru's unneeded and stumbling preface. Anguishing over his own weakness for prolonging issue, Subaru frantically forces the wheels in his head to turn. In never before-seen, full brainpower. Forcing his synapses to fire so hot they might spark, finding the absolute best answer—!

Subaru: "Honestly, it's about Rem. Rem kinda, told me she l... you, you can get what I'm saying, right? So, with that confession there, where this's going's I guess sorta selfish but..."

Subaru feels sweat rise on his brow as he frantically gets to cutting the ice. He's already entered some kind of excuse-scented direction on this, but he figures that Emilia, being not bad at conjecture, will understand what he's saying. Emilia raises her hands.

Emilia: "Hold on,"

Emilia: "Subaru, calm down. I'm starting to lose what you're trying to say, but I can tell that you're trying sooo hard. You're a good boy, take it slowly."

Subaru: "«You're a good boy» is a crazy depressing thing to hear! Or no, I really wasn't being a man. Yeah, let's just go straight for it. Alright, so, well, actually, Rem told me she loves me, and once you love me too it's sorta... like, you'll both be mine, or something!?"

A momentum-propelled confession of two-timing. Even Subaru is repulsed by what he just said. Emilia's reaction would surely be something similar, or maybe she'd look at Subaru with eyes hosting disappointment and scorn. Under those pessimistic abstractions, Subaru timidly looks at Emilia, and...

Emilia: "—"

Her reaction is nothing that Subaru envisioned. Her brows scrunch up as she silently puts her finger to her lip, in thought. Perhaps she's meditating over Subaru's comment, thinking up a suitable punishment for him — and, with an atmosphere that leaves no room for jokes—

Emilia: "Subaru."

Subaru: "Yes."

Hearing his name, Subaru looks Emilia straight-on. Emilia, too, faces Subaru's resolved gaze straight-on. However, there's some confusion in her eyes, and with Subaru unable to comprehend what would make her react like that, her next words, which in the truest of meanings, transcend Subaru's comprehension, are—

Emilia: “—Rem... Who is that?¹”

¹ Opted to go with a translation that I feel fits the Japanese better when it comes to word order (“——レムって、誰のこと?”, the infamous “*Rem-tte... dare no koto?*”)

Arc 3 Fragment - Natsuki Rem

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 9, Fragment “Natsuki Rem”

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by SummaryAnon — [Complete](#)

—Beneath a pristine sky of blue, Subaru squints up at the downpour of daylight.

He hears someone crying.

A girl crying. Crying with all her might, using all the strength in her little body. Seeing her pour all her soul into showcasing her emotions, Subaru idly wonders how it is that kids have so much energy. And after thinking it, he's stunned at himself for how geriatric it is to think such a thing.

Subaru: “I already knew that I'd gotten old, but noticing it being an unconscious instead of conscious thing sucks. And when I was trying be still full of youth and boundless energy.”

???: “The hell is that about youth and boundless energy. You ever take a damn objective look at yourself?”

Thus, some insults coming from Subaru's side were heard. The familiar, crude voice makes Subaru sigh as he lazily turns to look at the speaker. Subaru is seated on a chair, and a boy stands next to him at even eye level. The boy frowns in response to Subaru's silent staring.

Boy: “But anyway—”

Boy: “Do something about Spica's crying already! Seriously can't handle it.”

Subaru: “But I'm done for. Your heartless words have torn my tender soul to shreds. I've reverted to the mind of a child like Spica and I'm gonna start bawling. Forgive me and all that.”

Boy: “There's nothing forgivable about a grown man doing that in public!”

The boy gesticulates vigorously as he retorts to Subaru's immature manner of sulking. The action prompts the baby cradled in Subaru's arms, Spica, to take a deep breath. The two guys give useless statements of “ah” and “ouh” and — there comes the emotional explosion.

Spica: “Aaaa— hk!”

Subaru: “Aaaaugh! She's crying! Spica's crying! Look here Rigel, you better do something 'bout this, you're her brother!”

Rigel: “If you're gonna say that then isn't it you're the one who's gotta do something if you don't wanna be terrible!”

In a corner of a main street of a lively townscape, two guys pass the responsibility around as they cradle a baby.

Passersby look over at the noisy three, wondering what's going on. But after seeing the two of them running about in circles, they look away like “What, just the same as always”, and ignore it.

So the two's pattern of running around continues undisturbed. Could call it charming, or just as easily call it riotous and unpleasant.

Subaru: “We've got a little girl bawling her whole soul out over here, and not a single person's giving us a hand... Shit, what's wrong with society?! Have people's souls become so barren?”

Rigel: “This isn't the time to winge about the world! If we don't stop Spica's crying, what'll she say when she gets back—”

???: “When who gets back?”

Rigel: “Well, who else—”

Rigel crosses his arms, nodding, and glances behind him. When his face stiffens and he falls stupefied, his mouth gaping open in dumb shock. Following Rigel's gaze, Subaru also catches sight of this new character, and his eyebrows spring up.

Subaru: “Oh,”

Subaru: “Done shopping?”

???: “Yes, without problems... It seems you two have had some trouble.”

Subaru: “Nope, Spica's just super energetic. I'm raising her so once she's running circles like this, she'll be running circles around guys. She's got a future as a bad girl, heart's pounding here!”

Spica's eyes open slightly as she notices the woman, and opens her hands before reaching out to her. Her uncomfortable posture dictates her demand for swapsies, the alienation wounding Subaru's poor paternal heart.

Subaru: “That said, I ignore what she wants and make her cry again then this's just winding up where we started. *Oui*, all yours.”

Woman: “She's all mine.”

Subaru's tone is pretty reckless, but he is awfully gentle as he hands Spica over. A smile rises on the woman's face as she sees his fingers, cradling the babe like something ephemeral and precious. The woman accepts Spica and cradles her securely to her chest, before gently rocking her.

Woman: “No, your father and brother are just no good. It's essential for you to swiftly grow larger and scold them as well.”

Subaru: “Hey now, don't go implanting things in her head while she's still an infant.”

Subaru imagines himself, having just done or said something stupid, stuck between the two angry girls with their arms akimbo. And then adding Rigel to that picture,

Subaru: “What, that's not as bad as I thought. Actually, that's such a happy fantasy that I might start crying maybe.”

Rigel: “No damn thanks. Getting yelled at by my little sister would completely crush my dignity as a brother.”

Subaru: “There's no dignity out there that stays uncrushed after running in circles with me. I see, I see it... Loving your sister and constantly spoiling her, your future is one of being whipped.”

Rigel: “Don't push this on me just 'cause you're whipped yourself! I'm never gonna be like that.”

Subaru twiddles his fingers in a mysterious fashion as Rigel gives his objection. The one to furrow their brows at Rigel's refutation isn't Subaru — But the blue-haired woman who had been watching happily over the two's back-and-forth. In a calm, but firm tone, the woman calls Rigel's name.

Woman: “Rigel.”

Woman: “Is that any way for you to have been speaking in public? It is not tolerable.”

Rigel: “Ugh, but I mean...”

Woman: “Your mother hates «but I means». And, your previous statement was incorrect.”

The woman gives the calmed Spica, cradled in her arms, a tender smile.

Woman: “Your mother does not have your father whipped. Because your mother, always puts your father in number one.”

Spoken with her cheeks flush, a statement more embarrassing than bawling like a baby in public.

Rigel throws his arms up in surrender. Feeling something akin to an itch, Subaru smiles. The woman softly brushes her hair back as she blissfully watches over the family scene.

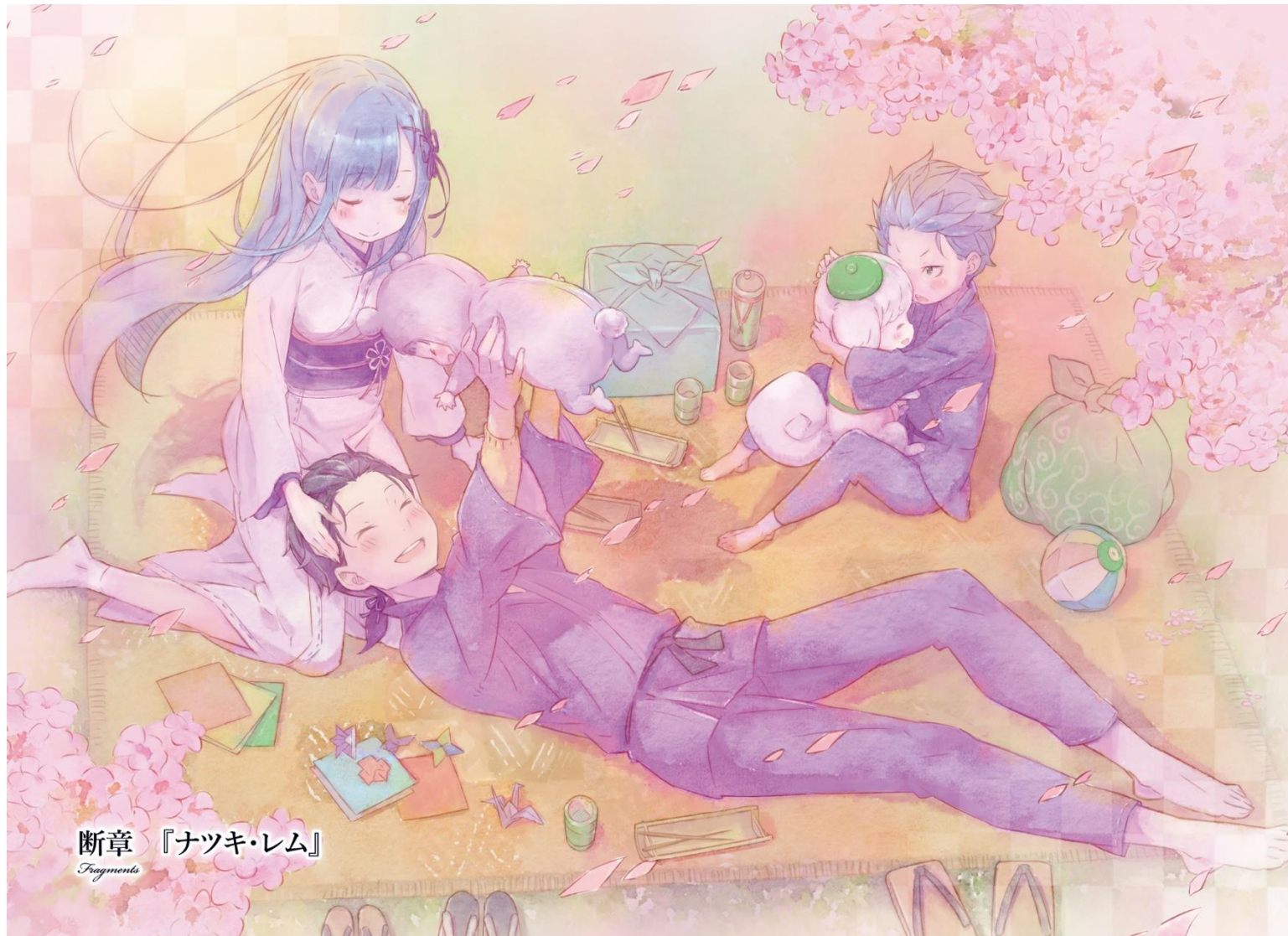
Rem's long hair, blue as the sky and caressed by the wind, sways in the breeze.

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They're in a corner of a city in Kararagi — A spot that you could maybe or maybe not call a park. Subaru spaces out as he sits on one of the benches there.

He watches the blue-, short-, spiky-haired Rigel run about back and forth with his somewhat brattish friends. The way he talks with his dad is impermissible but watching him playing like this makes him seem like something cute.

Subaru: “If only we could do something about those nasty serial killer eyes of his.”



Rem: “We mustn’t. Those nasty eyes are who Rigel is. Even if he is enjoying himself, no matter how gleeful he is, strangers seeing him for the first time will think him nefarious and displeased because of his face. That is who Rigel is.”

Rigel: “I can hear you, and mom, your support actually really hurts!”

Screams Rigel, who has been caught by the oni and is in a state of being frozen, in this game that Subaru popularized called Freeze Oni².

Subaru gives him a casual wave and so does Rem, hers small and careful so as not to disturb a sleeping Spica. Rigel pouts with his sharp *sanpaku*³ gaze dissatisfied. He looks like Subaru did in his childhood photo albums, and unbearably so.

Subaru: “Which means it’s already decided that his future will end up like this. I’d shudder if I were him... Being told that I’d tun into me in twenty years.”

Rem: “Skilled at cooking and incredible at housework. Will acquire an ideal, wonderful wife who is respectful and devoted to her valiant husband... Would be what you meant?”

Subaru: “What’s with that normie outburst? Wait, I’m the normie!”

Subaru puts his hand to his head and pokes out his tongue. Rem gives a small laugh and puts her hand to her mouth, before clicking her throat and glancing at Subaru.

Rem: “If you don’t deny that and adorn me so in compliments, do you realize I will get carried away?”

Subaru: “Where did I adorn you with compliments, in that exchange? All I did was purposefully not deny you praising yourself. Eh, that said it’s unmistakable truth and there’s nothing deniable about it.”

Actually, if you let Subaru get away with unrestrainedly, unabashedly talking about Rem, things turn into something horrible with all the compliments flying around. Being that it’s midday with kids scuffling in the park, lots of their family members and neighbors are around. If Subaru starts with the lovey-dovey

² Translator Note by SummaryAnon: “Variant of Freeze Tag”.

³ Translator Note by SummaryAnon: “*Sanpaku* is when the whites of the eyes are visible beneath the iris when resting, making the person look mad at all times”.

talk even once, the entire thing will escalate and inadvertently be the main topic of all the neighborhood gossip tomorrow.

That doesn't sound so bad, is a tempting poison in Subaru's thoughts, but he consciously ignores it and immerses himself in peace and harmony.

He closes his eyes while basking in sunlight, creating the illusion that he is floating upon the light's warmth. Something begins to drag his consciousness away, his exhaustion after consecutive late nights overpowering his attention. His head grows heavy, wavers. And,

Subaru: "Wha—"

Rem: "If you are tired, take my shoulder. As Spica is currently monopolizing my arms."

Subaru opens his eye to find Rem, who has scooped over to his side and is propping him up. With their height difference, his head will fit perfectly in the crook of her shoulder if he leans over.

Feeling some embarrassment, he looks down at Spica as she sleeps in Rem's arms — with her father's black hair, and her mother's adorable face. A sweet, innocent life yet ignorant of the world.

Subaru: "Ohhh, that damn Spica. You might be my darling daughter, but you're a bad girl for monopolizing my sanctuary. You're sentenced to tickle torture later."

Rem: "You will have to wait until nighttime to monopolize my breasts."

Subaru: "We're in a park in the middle of the day right now so could you please watch what you say!?"

Hearing that incredible line prompts Subaru to jerk far, far back. He glances over, to find that Rem is blushing beet red. How to put it,

Subaru: "My wife is mega cute."

Rem: "Only because I am so loved."

The two share a smile. Rem's being beaming, Subaru's being kind of weird — but it's still a smile.

Getting embarrassed at their prolonged mutual gazing, Subaru scratches his cheek to collect himself. “Then, I’ll oblige” he says as he boldly rests his head on Rem’s shoulder.

Her long hair feels strangely nice as it tickles his cheeks in the wind. While sniffing its scent, Subaru rubs his cheek against Rem’s shoulder.

Rem: “That tickles, darling.”

Subaru: “Ah, sorry. Did something and it felt good and I got super excited. Now I’m following Spica’s example and I’m all settled down. I’ll leave the being unsettled up to Rigel. Ewww, Rigel’s suuuch a kiiiiid!”

Rigel: “I can hear you, stupid dad! Stop bringing me up all the time!”

Rem: “Rigel. Your sister is sleeping, please be more considerate.”

Rigel: “This isn’t goddamn right!”

Screams the frozen Rigel, but no one in the family’s gonna back him up. Actually, nobody is going to help Rigel. His role is one of being teased.

Subaru finds that Rigel’s personality, speech and behavior coincides a lot with his own, but Rigel’s peers’ neglect to shun him might be the only point where his luck outstrips Subaru’s. That said, Subaru also felt that he was part of the community when he was a child. Rigel’s future isn’t looking so bright.

Subaru: “Gotta make sure Spica doesn’t turn out like that. Rigel’s unfortunate, but you take after Mom and have a bright future awaiting you. I’m just praying you don’t get caught in the grips of a useless guy like me.”

Rem: “There is not anybody who could substitute for you. You are the only copy of my darling in the world.”

Subaru gives a small smile, and the two fall into silence. With the gentle wind tickling him, and Rem’s body heat on his skin, this world of innocence could about swallow him.

Days of manual labor have built up some physical strain in Subaru. These occasional instances of family time are where he delights in the happiness of daily living. Basking in sunbeams, watching his son get teased by his friends, napping while cuddling up to his wife, while she cradles his daughter.

—Was this not sweet happiness?

Rem: “Subaru-kun—”

Subaru opens his eyes at the sudden address. He glances over to see Rem, her head tilted slightly towards him. Her pale blue eyes reflect Subaru, her lips trembling, suggesting that she has something to say.

Subaru: “That name...”

Rem goes silent.

Subaru: “Been a while. You’ve only been calling me «darling» or «your father» lately.”

Subaru closes his eye, his mouth relaxed, but Rem’s tense. Her attitude makes Subaru think of several years ago, back when they had just run away, where this kind of thing was incredibly common. She’d been trying to keep Subaru from noticing, but Subaru paid more attention to Rem than she thought.

Subaru closes his eyes. Feels the breeze. Rem was the one who proposed they all go shopping today. Subaru has a bit of a guess as to why.

Subaru: “It’s been eight years since that day, now.”

Rem: “So you noticed...”

Subaru: “Well, it’s a huge turning point for me... No, for us. I noticed, remembered, didn’t forget... Would never forget.”

The day he knelt before fate. Abandoned everything... and ran away.

He had meant to give up on everything. But there was one thing he couldn’t surrender that day. Their decision that day, and her love — Because that was there, Subaru was now here.

Rem: “Subaru-kun, do you...”

It’s a nostalgic form of address, and one that Rem consciously phased out of using shortly after they fled to Kararagi. Partly to indicate their status as a couple to those around them, but also to make a change from the past.

Subaru had purposefully never referenced this fact until today, and Rem had never told him her reason for it either.

A whirlpool of complex emotion churns in Rem's eyes.

Rem: "...Have any regrets?"

Subaru: "Regrets?"

Rem: "Yes. About running away. About giving up. About throwing so much away. About, me being what you..."

Subaru: "If you say «settled for» I'll get super mad. I get to come home hand-in-hand with Rigel and Spica! Oh, nah, don't really need Rigel. Just leave him behind."

Subaru sees Rigel's face turn sour, but he feigns ignorance while shooting him the "I'm having an important discussion right now" look to send him hurtling down into the abyss. He turns back to Rem.

Subaru: "Y'know,"

Subaru: "This is seriously super late to mention, eight years down the line and all, and I really have no idea how much effect this'll have after saying it tens or hundreds or thousands of times, but..."

Rem: "Yes."

Subaru: "I love you more than anything in the world. You're my only wife, and I'm your only man. You're not the kinda cheap woman a guy like me could get by making compromises."

He gets himself upright and bounces his finger off Rem's forehead. Rem looks surprised as Subaru brings his face closer to hers.

Subaru: "Just as I pledged that day, everything I am belongs to you. I devote myself to you, give myself to you, live only for you. —Though now, also for our children."

Subaru brings his face closer and steals a kiss, nothing more than fleeting contact.

While close enough to feel the other's breath, Subaru makes a mischievous face, the one that never changes no matter how much he ages.

Subaru: "So, that ease you?"

Rem: "...I'm sorry. I am always uneasy. Because I continuously fall more deeply in love with you, Subaru-kun. I believe that there could be nothing happier than this, and then it happens that I experience even greater, further happiness. Happiness, and love, and so unease."

Tears well up in Rem's eyes while she speaks of happiness, simultaneously shaking her head. She puts her forehead to Subaru's, each sharing the other's warmth.

Rem: "It feels as though one day, my darling who I touch like this, will disappear."

Subaru: "Relax. I'm not leaving you, and I'm never gonna disappear. So long as your love for me hasn't exhausted, we'll never be separated."

Rem: "Subaru-kun, my love for you would never be exhausted—"

Subaru: "Well then, together forever. I love you, Rem."

Again, Subaru kisses Rem. Teeth meet soft lips, her face frozen in surprise as Subaru plunges in deeper. Their tongues intertwine, her saliva hot on his tastebuds.

There is where he separates. Rem takes a little breath, her breathing now longer and heavier. Subaru raises his finger.

Subaru: "And besides,"

Subaru: "Don't say stupid things about it being a compromise or whatever. What's a compromise? You mean we had Rigel and Spica out of sympathy, not love? Spica's the embodiment of our planned love, and Rigel's a kid born from the recklessness and flaring passions of the love in our youth."

Rem: "...It certainly was a time when Rigel was born."

Says Subaru with hand on hip in lecturing posture. Rem smiles and counting the memories off on her fingers...

Rem: “We had moved to Kararagi and finally found jobs and a residence, and what we needed to do was slowly, carefully prepare our foundations to live, and yet...”

Subaru: “No well look, I was young and impatient.”

Rem: “You were supposed to be exhausted after work, Subaru-kun, and yet bedtime certainly saw you lively.”

Subaru: “No, well, look, I was young and had stamina.”

Rem: “The time that we acquired formal employment and the time I became pregnant were almost simultaneous. How paled my face turned then.”

Subaru: “Sure are hard to accept, those follies of your youth.”

Rigel's face sours at getting treated like a mistake, but he appears to read the mood and manages to control himself. Pretty good son. Subaru gives him a nod, and Rem also turns her gaze to him.

Rem: “But,”

Rem: “Honestly, I was happy when I was pregnant with Rigel.”

Subaru: “And I was too. When I first found out, my nose leaked and I pissed myself a little, and after I got you to punch me to make sure I wasn't dreaming man it got bloody.”

This probably happened because she had been inches from exploding in rage, but she punched him hard enough that when he slammed against the wall, the whole of their temporary residence slanted.

If Subaru hadn't managed to brace himself, he feasibly could have died. That one aside, Subaru remembers everything from when Rem told him she was pregnant, and all the warm feelings that surged through his chest back then.

But Rem shakes her head. Subaru tilts his head, not getting it. A slight shadow comes over Rem's smile.

Rem: “My happiness was surely different from your pure one, Subaru-kun. What made me happy... was my delight that I would never lose you.”

Subaru goes silent.

Rem: “Rigel is the bond between you and me in tangible form. The phrasing is not nice, but with a baby being born between us, we would be bound together by something that could never be severed... That is why I was happy.”

Maybe this was what was making her so anxious back then. They had abandoned everything and fled to a new land together, with only each other to cling to. Meaning that Rem was constantly terrified that she may lose Subaru.

Rem's self-esteem is low enough to put up a good fight with Subaru's. Considering how Rem undervalues herself, life with Subaru meant constant exhaustion between the extremes of happiness and the extremes of terror.

What ended those extremes was the new life born between them.

Subaru: “You didn't believe?”

Rem: “No, I did. I believe in you more than anyone in the world, Subaru-kun.”

Subaru: “Not that. I don't mean not believing in me... You didn't believe in yourself?”

Rem's breath catches, and she gives a small nod. Her mental image of Subaru is inordinately grand. Her own presence, in opposition to that, must feel unnervingly minuscule.

—She must not have noticed that Subaru had always held the exact same unease. Even though Subaru had always considered Rem a girl far, far too good for himself.

It makes Subaru smile. Seeing that, Rem puffs out her cheeks.

Rem: “Fine. I was stupid. Of course you would laugh.”

Subaru: “No no no. I just had that thought again. That you and I have the exact same character, but despite that my wife truly is the cutest in the world.”

Subaru's sneak attack makes Rem freeze for a moment in surprise, and she blushes. Seeing her reaction makes Subaru feel vividly that yes, he loved her. He loved Rem more than anyone in the world. Was in

love with her. He could scream it from the top of lungs. And in reality, he occasionally did. They're a pretty famous, fiery couple in the neighborhood.

Rem: “—Rigel, Spica.”

Subaru: “Hm?”

Subaru tilts his head. Rem looks up at him.

Rem: “They are both the names of stars. The names of stars from the place where you lived.”

Subaru: “Yup. My dad was fundamentally a crazy, unfortunate kind of man who'd spell «common sense» as «common cents», but I think him naming me Subaru was a good decision. I really like it, my name. Subaru's a star name too, see.⁴”

An assignment in primary school required that the students investigate the origins of their names, which was how Subaru came to learn the history behind his own. Upon learning that he was named after a cluster of the stars that painted the night sky, he felt uncharacteristic glee.

Ever since, despite his tendency to drop hobbies quickly, perusal of manuals and indexes about stars alone remained a long, long-standing custom. He knew the names of most stars, and whenever he had the opportunity to name something, his selection would of course be,

Subaru: “A star name, basically. My online usernames were star names, and if I ever needed an alias or a fake name it'd probably be from a star. In some sense, aren't these sparkle names!?”

Rem: “I would not know in what sense you mean, but I think it's wonderful to take names from stars. When we have our third, let's do the same.”

Subaru: “Talking about a third right now's kinda pretty hasty. Like, Spica's still an infant.”

Rem: “I believe it would be fine to entrust her to Rigel once she's no longer breastfeeding. Why do you think I cautioned you that we couldn't have another child until Rigel was larger?”

⁴ Translator note by SummaryAnon: “Subaru's name (Kanji: 昴, Katakana: スノバル) stands for the Pleiades, an asterism in the constellation of Taurus, and the seven sisters from Greek mythology, and has the additional Japanese meaning of «to combine».”

Subaru: “It doesn't really stand out since I'm around, but you're pretty damn harsh on Rigel too, Rem!”

Subaru stands up, brushing off his behind. He turns his back toward Rem, revolves his hips,

Subaru: “Wanna put our shopping down, so say it's ‘bout time to go home. Outside we have the public eye bothering us and we can't get as lovey-dovey as we want.”

Rem: “Indeed. I am in the mood for full-strength full-power lovey-dovey for the first time in a while.”

Subaru: “C-can my libido really keep up with an oni's stamina...?”

Subaru mutters to himself in terror, then holds his hand out to Rem, still seated on the bench. Rem leisurely takes his hand and pulls herself up, simultaneously pulling Subaru into her arms. Subaru takes his time relishing the warmth of hugging both Rem and Spica, then...

Subaru: “Right, off we go then. To our home.”

Rem: “Yes, darling.”

Subaru holds the shopping bag in one hand, Rem's hand in the other. Subaru walks a half-step ahead of Rem, who huddles up close behind him as she follows. They go over to their son, still frozen in the middle of the square.

Subaru: “Hey, my son who is presently enjoying the Sapporo Snow Festival. This game of Freeze Oni isn't going anywhere and watching it is the peak of boring, so me, mom, and your sister are going home. You go stay at a friend's overnight.”

Rigel: “Aren't you just plain goddamn throwing me out!? Or no, actually, let's talk about how my parents were there in the middle of a park in broad daylight, kissing.”

Subaru: “That's what you get, Mr. Jealous. Too bad, Rigel. This Rem's for my use only.”

Rigel: “Shut up!!”

Rigel screams in anger, setting his sharp *sanpaku* gaze on the chortling Subaru. But Rigel sees that Subaru seems to enjoy all this, and gives a long, deep sigh. Rigel shakes his head.

Rigel: “Cool it, cool it, me. Don't get caught up in dad's pace. Cool it, coool it. Right, cooled it. So, what were you talking about with mom?”

Subaru: “Hmm? Stuff like how your name's a star name. Actually, the first candidate for your name was Vega, but...”

Rigel: “That's badass! Why didn't you!?”

Subaru: “Uh, because it's badass? Felt like you'd be hard to deal with in your rebellious age, so we stopped on that one. I knew that age would pass eventually, but this father's heart of mine didn't wanna get bested by its son.”

Rigel: “That's how far you imagined the future of a just-born infant!?”

Rigel jumps up as he retorts to Subaru's clever joking. And...

???: “Ahh, Rigel moved! Rigel broke the rules of Freeze Oni!”

Rigel: “Ah!”

The Oni verbally assaults Rigel at this critical juncture. Rigel's throat freezes. Subaru gives Rigel's shoulders a slap.

Subaru: “Guys who break the rules of Freeze Oni play a penalty game. Oni's gonna get tickled 'till he can't laugh or cry anymore. —Good luck.”

Rigel: “Don't say something so stupid with such a serious expr... Hey, what, you guys! Sto— Wait! Don't take this man's words seriously! Wa, wuahaaaaaaaaaaaa—!”

Children appear one-after-another to chase Rigel around. Rigel flees. But they capture him. They push him to the ground, his limbs restrained, and assault his body with their merciless fingers.

Subaru: “Farewell, my son. You were a good boy. Your father was the one at fault.”

Rem: “Rigel. Your mother and father have important things to discuss, so stay overnight at a friend's house for today. Also, you are forbidden to use your horn. So as not to tear your clothes.”

Rigel: “I, I’ll remember this, you heartless parents—!!”

Spica sees her big bro getting tortured by scores of tickly hands and makes a happy-sounding noise. Seems like she’s got a promising kind of personality to her. She’ll probably become a bigger star in the Natsuki household than Rigel.

With his somewhat twisted exhibition of love for his darling Rigel conveyed, Subaru takes Rem’s hand and starts walking. Towards the tranquility and happiness-filled abode in which his precious family live.

Rem: “Subaru-kun.”

Subaru: “Hm?”

Rem tugs on his hand, prompting Subaru to stop walking. He glances back. The moment he does, a strong wind blows past the two. Subaru unwittingly closes his eyes, slowly opening them again once the wind’s noise subsides.

The wind caresses Rem’s long, blue hair, which glimmers so much as if to melt into the sunlight. Rem, with her hair grown long. Subaru more or less knows in counter to whom she had done that. When Subaru now thought of long-haired girls, the first image to arise in his mind was that of the most precious woman in the world, right here in front of him.

Cradling their beloved daughter, her long blue hair gently tousled in wind, Rem smiles at Subaru. For Subaru, that was the smile of his most beloved, which evoked adoration in him paralleled by no other.

Rem: “I, right now, am happier than any in the world.”



Illustration from Volume 9, coloring by TZeeno ([source](#), has been deleted)

Arc 3 Interlude II - Let's Eat

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 9, Interlude “Let Us Feast”

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken – [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

—In the swaying dragon carriage, Rem was only thinking of him.

Suddenly hearing someone calling her name, Rem softly lifted her face and narrowed her eyes against the bright radiance of the sun.

She gazed at the entourage of dragon carriages ahead. Inside them, were the wounded soldiers of the battle with the White Whale.

All in all, only their most urgent wounds had been treated and more than a few of them were still seriously injured. Yet, despite their pain, the corners of their lips revealed only the sense of accomplishment for having fulfilled a long-cherished dream. After carrying this dream for so many years, to see it finally realized meant more to them than injury or death. Having achieved what they set out to do, they now ride towards the Capital on their triumphant return.

Taking all this into her sight, Rem hated herself for not being able to hold back the pain inside her heart.

Crusch: “You look anxious, Rem. Are you still worrying about him?”

Rem: “...Crusch-sama.”

Glancing towards the voice, it was Crusch sitting beside her.

Wrapped in light bandages, it was commendable how Rem revealed no signs of the seriousness of her injuries, but it was impossible to conceal her depleted stamina. The fact that they rode in a carriage was

also because Crusch didn't feel comfortable letting Rem ride a ground dragon alone in this condition. So she resolved to accompany her, at least until the Capital is within their sights.

Sensing Rem's unsettled look, Crusch casually shrugged.

Crusch: "Compared to this..."

She shook her head,

Crusch: "He has Wilhelm, Ferris, the elites of the expedition, and Ricardo's mercenary company, all there to assist him. Besides, Anastasia must have predicted this turn of events. Even if the adversary's strength is a concern, I don't think there is any reason they would lose."

Rem: "Even so, I still can't help but selfishly worry."

Crusch: "Still can't remove the source of anxiety, huh... When the obstacle is within you, it would be possible to improve yourself until it is overcome. But when it's about other people, it does become quite difficult... Ah, I am quite terrible at comforting people after all, my apologies."

Seeing Rem sink deeper into her worries, Crusch realized she had misspoken and lowered her eyes. But seeing the always cold and formal Crusch suddenly so out of character, Rem couldn't help but curl the corners of her lips into a smile.

Crusch: "Mn, that's good."

Seeing this, Crusch nodded contently,

Crusch: "Natsuki Subaru said it before, «a smile suits Rem better, doesn't it?». Even though it sounded like it came out of nowhere, it wasn't an entirely stupid thing to say."

Rem: "Crusch-sama... You know when you smile, you give off a completely different impression. You're usually stern, yet once you smile you become..."

Crusch: "People do say that. I can't say I'm not angry about it. I guess just because I don't smile for no reason in front of people, I'm becoming rather unlovable..."

Rem wasn't sure whether to take that as a joke, but seeing Crusch's gentle smile, her lips opened into a smile as well. Courageous and proud, to Rem, who had always been lacking confidence, Crusch was an ideal woman. But of course, in Rem's heart, the highest honor was reserved for none other than her older sister, Ram.

Crusch: "Ahead of their path is the Witch Cult... Even though it was more or less to be expected considering Emilia's identity, until we know more about them, caution is necessary. Natsuki Subaru realizes this, but surely Lord Mathers has a plan as well?"

Rem: "The depths of my master's mind, Rem couldn't possibly know. Even if you ask me, I wouldn't be able to say."

Crusch: "That's harsh. Now that we're allies after all, a little information slipping around wouldn't be too bad."

Perhaps it was meant to distract Rem from sinking into negative thoughts again. Indeed, it was thanks to Crusch that Rem wasn't left alone with her worries.

Besides, Crusch made a good point. A man such as Roswaal L. Mathers must have had a grand plan for all this. Surely Subaru's actions were all furthering his master's goals, while also at the same time recovering his lost reputation.

Or, actually, with the slaying of the White Whale, his reputation had already far surpassed what it was before.

—Hero, Natsuki Subaru.

To Rem, whose heart and future he had saved, this assessment is only a matter of course, and considering the bright future he has yet to create, it is also more than justified.

And then, to be at the side of that radiant hero, a place he could occasionally turn to and make sure that she was there: if only that place could hold her existence, then there is nothing else in the world Rem would wish for. With this alone, she would be content.

When Subaru appears in her mind, Rem's heart is always full of turmoil. It becomes warm, and perhaps calm. Yet somehow it also becomes full of pain, of anxiety, of longing and worry. To give her heart at once so much happiness and so much suffering, only Subaru could do this to her.

With a smile carved upon her lips, Rem's thoughts turned to her future: her and Subaru's future.

Stealing a glance at the side of Rem's face, Crusch exhaled a sigh of relief. Caressing the scabbard of her knight-sword with her fingers, her eyes stared in silence into the road ahead — Her thoughts were of the long path to the Capital.

Crusch: “—h?”

Rem: “———?”

Crusch squinted her eyes, the same instant Rem heard a noise and raised her head.

What Crusch's eyes captured was something off about the dragon carriage up ahead. The noise Rem heard came from the same direction. In fact, both clues were leading to the same conclusion.

In Crusch's eyes, the dragon carriage disintegrated. In Rem's ears, the prelude to collapse echoed like the sound of raindrops.

A mist of blood sprayed out. The image of the dragon carriage in front of them suddenly transformed into a pitiful blur.

The ground dragon, the carriage, and all the wounded inside were completely uprooted, and then shattered mercilessly by overwhelming devastation.

Crusch: “—! Enemy attack!”

Her astonished throat delayed only an instant, before Crusch bellowed out the rally call. With Crusch at the helm, the surrounding dragon carriages sensed the crisis and prepared for battle.

Rem, pushing away all sensations of injury and exhaustion and with her morning star in hand, stood up at once— On the other side of the blood mist was the upright shadow of a man.

Who is that man, now burning into her sight, standing in the middle of the road?

Without weapon, without armor, without fear. Without compassion or malice or intent—!

Crusch: “—Run him over!!”

Crusch's command came roaring from atop the driver's platform. Hearing the command, the knight-driver snapped the reins in acknowledgment. With a cry, the ground dragon led the carriage charging—with surging momentum capable of shredding any victim coming into contact.

Without deviation from the mark, it was a head-on collision into the upright figure. The man showed no intention of moving. And just like that, the two objects touched, the slender body about to be ripped to shreds by the—

Rem: “Crusch-sama—!”

With this cry, Rem picked up Crusch by the waist and flew off the side of the carriage. There was no time to reach for the driver, Rem landed biting her lip, thinking this.

And then, right after—

Man: “Agh, really? Don't do that. I didn't even do anything, and someone wants to crush me to death. Really, that isn't what people should be doing. I don't think so.”

He spoke with the relaxed demeanor of a man leisurely walking in a park or basking in the sun or some such situation.

If it weren't for the shattered debris of what used to be the dragon carriage, Rem would not have found this scene to be so bizarrely horrifying.

No matter how you look at it, the man doesn't seem anything out of the ordinary.

His body was slender, and his neat white hair was neither long nor short, nor particularly odd. His black clothes were neither flamboyant nor shabby, and his face was not eye-catching at all. He looked so very ordinary that perhaps no matter where you put him, he would not seem out of place, and if you met him on the street, you'd forget him within ten seconds.

But the fact is, upon encountering this man, the ground dragon was ripped in two, its feet still in mid-stride, and then, along with the driver and carriage, shattered into countless indiscernible pieces.

The most frightening part is, though Rem never looked away, all she saw was this man merely standing there.

Not doing anything, just by standing there the man survived collision with a charging dragon carriage, and still stood there as if it were nothing.

Crusch: "Thank you, Rem, for saving me. But... it seems the situation hasn't improved."

Still being carried in Rem's arms, Crusch thanked her, stood back up, and in the same instant drew her knight-sword from its sheath. For the driver who followed her order and was shattered into a thousand pieces as a result, Crusch grieved his death in her heart and narrowed her eyes,

Crusch: "To so cruelly murder my subjects, do not think this will end so easily... Who are you?"

With her naked blade gleaming with the intent to kill, she threw these words at the man. Taking in these words, the man touched his chin and began nodding as if he understood.

Man: "Ah I see I see right right, you don't know about me. But I know about you. The whole Capital... actually, the whole country is talking about you. You are a candidate to be the next Monarch, after all. Even I, so out of touch with the world, can imagine what a great burden..."

Crusch: "Idle talk ends now— Answer my question, or the next time I shall slay you."

Man: "That's really extreme! But then you wouldn't be able to run a country otherwise. Yet this sentiment, I really don't understand it one bit... This desire to wear the crown, and take up all those responsibilities, how can anyone understand it? Ah, ah, even though I don't understand, I won't disagree with you. I'm not so arrogant as that, not one bit. Unlike you..."

Not paying any attention to Crusch's demand, the man just kept on and on. And then,

Crusch: "—As I said, that was the last chance."

As Crusch coldly pronounced these words, her arm swung out a blade-of-wind.

Crusch's wind-magic combined with swordsmanship unleashes an invisible slash— Renowned as “One Blow, One-Hundred Felled”⁵, it is a powerful ultra-long-range slash that can sever a man's body without him even knowing where, or who, it came from.

Back then, when the Witchbeast Great Rabbit appeared in the plains of the Karsten Duchy, she slew all the Witchbeasts under the Great Rabbit's command in her first ever battle, and it was that time onward Duchess Crusch Karsten earned the name “One Blow, One-Hundred Felled”.

Even the White Whale's adamant skin was opened by this blade, as it played no small part in bringing down that colossal Witchbeast. Compared to the White Whale, this small, frail body could not possibly withstand... Yet,

Man: “...Attacking someone while they're talking, just where are your manners?”

Head tilted, as if flaunting how his body took no damage, the man just stood there.

His existence was utterly unaffected by a slash that could rend even the White Whale's armor. The man's body— No, even his clothes were unscathed.

He did not defend the attack. Rather, it was something wholly different and unknown.

Crusch could not help but hold her breath, and Rem froze in place, after witnessing something so far outside the realm of understanding. In front of them, the man sighed for the first time.

Man: “You know...”

He went on with a tone lowered by displeasure,

Man: “I was talking. Wasn't I talking just now? And then you interrupted me. Isn't that a bit impolite? Don't you think that was wrong? I have the right to speak... even though I don't really want to have to point this out, but to not interrupt people when they're speaking... isn't that just common social decency? You're free to listen or not listen I won't bother you about that, but just what are you trying to do by not letting me talk?”

⁵ Called “Hundred-Men-Cut” by TranslationChicken, and “Hundred-Man Slash” by SummaryAnon.

As he ranted, the man occasionally stomped the ground with a displeased expression on his face. And just like this, he pointed his finger at the two in front of him, both now eerily speechless.

Man: “And now you’re quiet, what is this? You’re listening. You were listening, right? Wasn’t I asking you something? Then give me some kind of reply, it should be like that, right? You won’t even do that, don’t even want to do that. Ah, ah, freedom. That’s your freedom. You see me ranting and you want to kill me, then when I ask you a question, you ignore me like I’m the wind. So, it’s like that, is it? Well you’re free to do that. Alright, let’s just say it’s like that. But then, what is that supposed to mean?”

Seeing the two standing silently in front of him bracing for an attack, he tilted his head and stared at them with his sharp eyes, and then, with a smothered voice,

Man: “You’re disregarding my rights— One of my only few possessions, right?”

Just as a chill ran up Rem’s back, the man took a step forward. His drooping arm lifted, sweeping up a small gust of wind.

Then, on the same line as the motion of his arm— The earth, the air, and the world parted in two.

Round and round and round, Crusch’s severed left shoulder flew into the air.

Still grasping onto the sheath of a knight-sword, the arm dropped down in a spray of blood. Crusch, blown off her feet by the impact, fell to the ground, convulsing in pain and mass loss of blood.

Rem: “Crusch-sama—”

Stunned for few seconds, Rem rushed to the side of the fallen Crusch. She placed her hands on Crusch’s wound and with the small final remnant of her Mana, applied all her power to stop the bleeding.

Crusch’s shoulder flowed bright crimson, the flesh, bones, nerves and arteries were all perfectly severed. A clean and masterful attack, Rem sighed with a rather inappropriate admiration.

Crusch: “Ferris... Oh... You?”

Under Rem’s healing hands, Crusch looked on with unfocused eyes, muttering indiscernibly, and, with her remaining right arm, grasped tightly onto Rem’s knee. Proof that she still possessed the strength to live. Crusch clenched her teeth, enduring her pain.

Rem kept her eyes on the man's every movement.

She has no means of defending against his strikes. At the first sign of an attack, to leap away with Crusch is the only thing she could do.

In a moment of eerie realization — for some reason Crusch and Rem are all alone — why hasn't anyone come to their aid? In this critical juncture, with their lord gravely wounded, those knights who did not cower even in the face of the White Whale, why—

???: “Ah really... I eat and I eat it's still not enough! It's because of that, we keep on living! Eating, chewing, biting, ripping, crunching, munching, sucking! Gluttonous drinking! Gluttonous eating! Ah— I'm done!”

All of a sudden from behind came the shrill, ear-splitting voice of a teenager.

Like the first man, the youth's voice sent chills running up Rem's spine. Her body stiff, she turned to look at him. The youth stood among several empty carriages, from head to toe he was covered in blood.

His long, dark-brown hair extending all the way down to his knees, his body was short, about the same height as Rem, and perhaps two or three years younger — perhaps not much older than the kids in the village near the mansion.

Under his hair, only a thin, blood-soaked rag covers his slender body. Every inch of his skin is coated with blood.

Of course, none of the blood was his. It was from the knights lying at his feet.

While Crusch and Rem were in a standoff with the man in front, the knights had engaged the enemy behind them. In the end, before Rem even sensed any combat, it was already over.

Rem: “You, are...”

Her voice quivering, Rem, with Crusch in her arms, backed up until both enemies were within her field of vision. Blood from Crusch's shoulder had dyed the road red. Now the air turned cold, as if mocking their weakness, their fear.

Hearing the question, the man and the youth looked at each other.



Illustration from Volume 9, coloring by Setowi ([source](#))

As if it had all been arranged, they nodded to each other. Then with the same deranged smile of violent delight, they announced their name.

Man: “Sin Archbishop of the Witch Cult, representing Greed, Regulus Corneas!”

Youth: “Sin Archbishop of the Witch Cult, representing Gluttony, Ley Batenkaitos!”

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Ley: “When we sensed our pet got killed, we came to have a look. But then, ah! — What a delightful harvest! It’s good, it’s pretty good, it’s very good, it’s great, it’s wonderful, it’s terrific, it’s breathtaking, it’s remarkable! It’s spectacular! Passion! Love! Hate! Chivalry! Oh joy! And sorrow! That is, that is! That is worth eating!”⁶”

Witch Cult— and Sin Archbishop.

When those words reached Rem’s ears, she stood frozen in place.

With an exhilarated expression the youth stomped on the ground while howling in strange noises. Spinning, as if dancing, his arms pointed to the fallen knights, and then looked at them as if with overwhelming compassion.

Ley: “How wonderful! To personally come to feed. It’s been really hard to find people with backbone nowadays. But now, I am rediscovering my hunger’s long-lost gratification!”

Regulus: “That’s what I don’t understand about you, Batenkaitos, your hunger isn’t real hunger, and the one being filled isn’t even you. Why can’t you be satisfied with just the way you are? We only truly possess what we hold in our own two hands and can carry with our own two arms. If you realize that, you will be able to control your desires, no?”

⁶ Translation note by SummaryAnon: “His pronouns consistently alternate between «僕たち» (bokutachi) and «俺たち» (oretachi), which are plural”.

Ley: “No need to get preachy old man, I don’t like being preached to. I don’t disagree with what you said, but I’m not interested either. To be honest, as long as I don’t starve — I don’t really care about the rest!”

Batenkaitos of Gluttony descended into a fit of deranged laughter, and Regulus of Greed shrugged disinterestedly.

Two Sin Archbishops appearing in the same place at the same time, Rem sank into thought.

In terms of strength, defeating these two is impossible.

Even though Crusch’s bleeding had been stopped, she is still in critical condition. Whether the knights are dead or comatose, they can no longer fight.

To heal Crusch, Rem had already overspent her mana, though if she were to transform into demon mode, she will be able to absorb mana from the atmosphere and put up a fight. But against these two, victory is inconceivable.

On the one hand is the flawless offense and defense of Greed. Known to be able to capture a city single-handedly, it is impossible to measure the full extent of his power. On the other hand, Gluttony is no less formidable. Though his abilities are as-of-yet unknown, he has managed to wipe out an entire battle tested army within seconds. No matter what, Rem could not see victory waiting for her in the near future.

She quickly scanned the battlefield; the Liger carriages are nowhere to be seen. The Demihuman mercenaries were tasked with transporting wounded soldiers — and the head of the White Whale. They might have escaped in the chaos and be retreating full speed toward the Capital right now. Commanding them must be the Fang of Iron Vice Captain — Hetaro — bright and resourceful, and possessing great common sense and judgement...

If given enough time, perhaps he will return with reinforcements.

But, even so — it will probably not arrive in time for Rem.

Rem: “White Whale...”

Regulus: “Eh?”

Ley: "Huh?"

She muttered quietly, and both Sin Archbishops tilted their head.

She held her breath for an instant, having found a clue to stall for time. Before they lost interest, she continued.

Rem: "Did you want the Whale back? Because we are transporting the severed head to the Capital right now."

Ley: "Head? Ah, I was beginning to wonder what that weird smell was. What happens to the head doesn't matter anyway. It's dead, sure bring it back, what can you do? If we want to, we could always make a new one... It'll take about the same amount of time to raise."

Saying this, Batenkaitos snapped his neck and ground his teeth,

Ley: "Compared to this..."

He said forcefully, and continued,

Ley: "Compared to a dead Whale we are more interested in the people that killed it. After four-hundred years someone finally killed that thing. Even though we were already expecting a feast... Ah! This is far beyond our expectations!"

His head shaking up and down, his long hair wildly swinging, the youth laughed with saliva flying from his mouth, clacking his teeth as he did so.

Ley: "Love! Chivalry! Hatred! Obsession! Accomplishment! Gathered together, brought to a boil and swallowed whole! The gratification! Is there anything in the world more delicious? No no no no no no no no no no there isn't there isn't there isn't! Gluttonous drinking! Gluttonous eating! So! My Heart! My Stomach! My joy and gratification are treeeeeeeeeeembling!!"

Incomprehensible.

As if losing control, Batenkaitos broke into shrill, convulsive laughter. Silently, Rem turned her eyes to Regulus, and Regulus waved hello.

Regulus: “Unfortunately, unlike him... I’m here purely, purely by accident... Not my intention at all... Of course, do I have hunger and desires like his? To hold such selfish, meaningless desires... Unlike his unsatisfied stomach torturing him, I, on the other hand, am completely, utterly, content with myself!”

Spreading his arms wide like a cross, Regulus stood in front of Rem with an utterly refreshing expression.

Crusch’s left arm was severed, yet his two arms are still free to bend and turn, it was like an act to flaunt his very existence.

Regulus: “Conflict, I hate that... For me, just merely enjoying the calm and safety of regular life is enough, I have no more need than that. Static, unchanging time and myself, that’s the best. Because my hands are small and powerless, for me, just for myself, just to protect my meager possessions I must use up all my strength. That’s my kind of fragile existence.”

Regulus emphasized it by clenching his hand into a fist. The hand that claimed countless lives, and the arm of a woman. Such an explanation is just taking it too far.

Be it Ley, a madman in a trance of deranged laughter, or Regulus, a self-righteous, self-satisfied and self-indulged blabbermouth, they certainly are Witch Cultists.

A storm of boiling rage was rising in her heart.

Rem laid Crusch, still faintly breathing, down on the grassy plain. She forced her quivering legs to stand. In her hand, she held her morningstar, and squeezing out the final drop of her depleted mana, spears of ice formed in the air around her.

Seeing this, Ley and Regulus’s expressions changed.

Regulus: “Was anybody listening? I believe I said I don’t want to fight? If you’re going take an attitude like that, then, then that’s ignoring my wishes... That’s violating my rights. One of the few meager possessions I was permitted to have... My property. Taken from me. — To me, already so few in my desires, this is... unforgivable!”

Rem: “Enough is enough, Witch Cultist.”

Raising her head toward Regulus, Rem pronounced these words firm and resolute. Toward the disappointed-looking Regulus, Rem rattled her iron chains.

Rem: "Sooner or later, a hero will appear. The amount of pain and suffering your self-indulgence and conceit had caused in the world, will be known to that hero. Rem's deeply beloved, one and only, hero."

Ley: "Hey, a hero. We'll be looking forward to that guy! If you believe in him so much, that guy must be delicious!"

Clapping his hands, body angled forward, Ley Batenkaitos stuck his tongue out at Rem. His eyes were not the eyes of a man looking at an enemy, much less at a woman. They were the eyes of a starving beast looking at his food.

The fallen knights behind Batenkaitos began to blur, and became indistinguishable.

Their existence, their position, none of it is now comprehensible to Rem. Why are they lying there, who are they, and what relation do they have to herself?

Just like the nightmare of one's existence being erased by the White Whale's mist. So, the Whale's master, Gluttony, possessed the same Authority.

Rem: "...Head Maid of the Household of Margrave Roswaal L. Mathers, Rem—"

Intending to proclaim her identity, Rem shook her head. In this moment, the name she really wanted to say was,

Rem: "—Right now, I am only someone who is beloved by the person she loves. Companion of the hero, the one I love the most in all the world, no matter what. Natsuki Subaru's companion, Rem."

A pristine white horn emerged from her forehead; an immense surge of mana flew into her body from the atmosphere.

Her body drinking in new strength, the chain of her morning star writhing, rattling, the ice spears around her ringing in anticipation.

She opened her eyes, taking in the world and the feeling of the atmosphere. In her mind, she was seeing his face.

Rem: “Prepare yourselves, Sin Archbishops. Rem’s hero shall bring punishment upon you!”

Raising her morning star, the same instant the ice spears flew, Rem’s body shot forth. As if in reply, Batenkaitos’ mouth stretched wide open, full of fangs.

Ley: “How wonderful!! —Ah such passion! Let’s eat!!”

Clash met clash, and in that instant, she thought—

“I wish, when he realizes I am gone, it would cause a small ripple in his heart.”

—This alone, was what Rem wished for in her final moment.

Arc 3 Interlude III - To Each, Their Oaths

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 9, Interlude “To Each Their Vows”

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#), [Part 4](#), [Part 5](#), [Part 5.5](#), [Part 6](#)

—Lying on the bed, her expression was serene. To Subaru she looked like she was sleeping.

Her lashes are so long... He thought in a daze, gazing at her closed eyes. She'd usually make an effort to keep her face expressionless, but in her sleep, a softness befitting her age was showing on her cheeks. Come to think of it, Subaru had never seen her asleep.

She always woke before him and went to sleep after he did. Subaru knew, to keep herself resolute, she had always tried to bury the childish side of her, but that stubborn facade had collapsed so many times before Subaru's eyes.

Be it surprised, or embarrassed, pouting or about to cry, or after opening their hearts her smile gleaming under her tears, there should be so many, so many chances to see them again—

Subaru: “—Rem.”

Even calling her name, caressing her soft, white cheeks, she made no response.

On the bed, deep in her slumber, the maid's dress so familiar on her shoulders, the white headband that adorned her hair so blue and beautiful as the sky, were all gone.

The attire she wore in her work, and in battle — She had no need for them now.

???: “There you are.”

In the room silent and stagnant as though time had stopped, someone called to Subaru.

Slowly turning, as though reluctantly, he looked behind him. It was a young woman with long, softly swaying hair. She wore a simple yet elegant dark blue evening dress, and even as she walked toward him, she seemed overflowing with grace.

But all her movements had a slightly muddled hesitation about them, which combined with the elegance of her person gave out a rather odd impression. Subaru cannot help but feel a sense of awkwardness when he is near her.

Long Haired Girl: "She..."

Subaru: "Still hasn't changed. Even though I can't do anything... I thought I could at least stay here with her. But that's such a cowardly thing to say."

Long Haired Girl: "Still, this... would make her happy, wouldn't it?"

Seeing Subaru's downcast expression, the woman timidly tried to console him. But hearing this, Subaru shot back a stare at once fierce, bitter, and cruel. His senses sharpened at her words; his eyes locked onto hers. Without meaning to, it was already far beyond his control. Noticing his reaction, the young woman placed her hands over her lips, "I'm sorry", she apologized.

Long Haired Girl: "I said something I shouldn't have, and hurt you, didn't I?"

Subaru: "No... No, I am the one who should apologize. I was only venting my anger all pent up inside... If I behave like this, Rem will be really, really angry with me, won't she? «You shouldn't be hurting people's feelings like that, Subaru-kun», or something like that."

He shrugged and said that softly in Rem's voice. In his mind, he heard her voice saying those words. A voice only he could hear. His impression sounded nothing like her, but there is not a person left in the world who could point that out.

Against Subaru's empty words and gestures, the woman sadly lowered her eyes, and held her left wrist with her right hand.

As if a shadow had descended between them, the room returned to silence.

This familiar feeling... Natsuki Subaru shouldn't stay like this, should he? Subaru shook his head internally.

To sink into the depths of an ocean of despair, is easy, even if only so the piercing anguish would go away. But it doesn't suit him — as the man she believes in, as the man Rem loves above all the world, this is not what Natsuki Subaru should do.

Never.

Subaru: "...You were looking for me, then?"

Long Haired Girl: "Yes, I want to hold a meeting with everyone present, so I've asked everyone to gather in the lounge, if it's alright with..."

Nodding with an expression like she's just been saved, the woman got right to the point. But then she stopped halfway through and furrowed her brows rather awkwardly. It took a while before Subaru noticed this.

Subaru: "My name is Natsuki Subaru."

Long Haired Girl: "...I'm sorry, Natsuki Subaru-sama. I will be sure to remember. Even though I've been told how much I am indebted to you... Please excuse me, my apologies!"

Subaru: "It can't be helped, can it? There must a lot of things you need to remember right now, don't worry about it."

As if to say she was very, very sorry, the young woman lowered her head.

Then, seeing her recover again with perfect grace, even femininity, Subaru cannot help but feel a sense of surreal incongruity stabbing at his chest. But even Subaru wasn't brash enough to say this out loud.

Shaking his head, Subaru decided to put that aside for now, and stood up.

Turning to the girl on the bed, he gently touched the hair on her forehead.

Subaru: "I'll be back, Rem."

Breathing softly, she really exists.

—Having been forgotten by all the world, this was her only remaining existence.

With Rem behind his back, Subaru turned to face the young woman.

Subaru: “The lounge is it? Let’s not make them wait, let’s go.”

Long Haired Girl: “Yes, let’s go, Natsuki Subaru-sama.”

Her head slightly inclining forward, softly smiling, she seemed at that moment like something out of a dream — her long, green hair, flowing with her every movement.

Hating having to admit this, Subaru turned away, hiding a genuine smile emerging on his face.

Subaru: “Thank you for coming to fetch me, Miss Crusch.”

With this name, Subaru thanked the long-haired girl — who seem to have become a different person entirely.

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—By the time Subaru arrived in the Capital, it was already over.

His conversation with Emilia on the road were all gone from his mind.

The girl sitting safely next to him, Subaru should feel content, and relieved, having finally, finally saved her. But in the relentlessly galloping dragon carriage, the only thing on Subaru’s mind was the other girl.

Emilia: “Rem... Who is that?”

Looking confused, she tilted her head as she said this.

He scrambled to look for the smallest hint of a joke, something in her voice, in her expression, hoping against hope the words “Just kidding~” would come out of her mouth...

Whether it’s Petra, or the other kids, no one remembered her.

Having confirmed this fact with everyone on the carriage, Subaru commanded the driver to rush to the Capital with all haste, on his face was the desperate expression of someone riding into death itself.

Impossible. There must be a mistake.

It was all going so well. Everyone was saved, the objective was completed. Despite enduring so much pain and sorrow, taking so many scars within his heart that will never, ever heal, everything worked out in the end.

And still—

???: “Aha! It’s Subaru-kyun! Impressive, Crusch-sama, you managed to find that capricious little stray!”

On the way to the lounge, seeing the two in the hallway, someone called out to them.

Shaking around in a short dress, liberated from the knight’s garments, a pair of catlike ears twitched. Ferris walked over to them and gently picked up Crusch’s hands.

Crusch: “Ferris-san...”

Ferris: “I’m just Ferris! Ferris and Crusch-sama have known each other for a very long time-nyan. If you still add a -san to my name I’m going to die of loneliness and despair-nyan.”

Holding up Crusch’s hands in one hand, Ferris used the other to nudge Crusch in the shoulder. At such affectionate interaction, Crusch looked like she wasn’t sure what to do with herself, but essentially accepted it as it is, and with a “Sorry”, she lowered her head.

Crusch: “To become just like before... Even though it’s not easy, I will try my best, Ferris... Yes. Just Ferris.”

Ferris: “It’s alright-nyan, because Ferris is always Crusch-sama’s companion, and will always stay by your side. And to be together with such a cute version of Crusch-sama, Ferris will find even more reasons to fall for Crusch-sama-nyan, just the thought of that makes Ferris happy-nyan!”

Playfully swinging Crusch’s captured hands up and down, Ferris blew her a kiss.

Watching them, the unease growing inside Subaru’s heart became unbearable.

Even though Crusch had changed so drastically, Ferris treated her the same as always, and accepted her as always, it was something beyond what Subaru could understand.

Inside that smile of Ferris', how much inner struggle must be lying within? Subaru doesn't know, nonetheless, the thought of it alone filled him with sentiment.

Ferris: "Subaru-kyun, get in the lounge-nyan. Emilia-sama and old man Wilhelm are waiting for us."

Subaru: "—A... Ah."

His thoughts must have added something into his voice, but Ferris didn't seem to notice. Saying "This way, Crusch-sama", Ferris led her by the hand.

In the subtle atmosphere between Subaru and Ferris, Crusch tried to hide the uncertainty looming between her brows. She looked at them, one and then the other, and in the end not saying a thing, silently followed behind Ferris' steps.

Taking a deep breath, Subaru bit his lips, and closed his eyes.

His mind was on edge. His heart felt desolate. In that state he didn't want to see anyone at all. But it can't be helped. He will not make excuses to comfort himself.

Because the last thing he'd want to do, is to blame her for his pain.

This way, they made their long-overdue entry into the lounge.

Noticing all eyes were on him, Subaru looked around the room. Other than himself, there were four people present, Emilia, Wilhelm, and one step before him, Crusch and Ferris. Seeing he must be the last one, Subaru closed the door behind him, and ever-so-naturally sat down next to Emilia.

Emilia: "Subaru..."

Subaru: "No problem. I've calmed down now, Emilia-tan —I, am, alright."

To Emilia's worried call, Subaru lightheartedly retorted. Only his eyes weren't looking at her. Rather, he couldn't see her at all.

If he met Emilia's eyes now, he would have revealed a despised part of himself. The very thought of it filled him with uncontrollable dread.

Ferris: “Now that everyone is here, let’s begin!”

With the sound of a clap, everyone’s attention landed on Ferris.

It would be impossible for Crusch to direct a meeting in her condition, so that task fell to Ferris.

Roughly surveying everyone present, Ferris walked to the front of the room with an arm in the air.

Ferris: “Since there are no objections-nyan, let’s assess our situation.”

Thus, with a smile, a meeting from which everyone wanted something completely different, began.

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—After the battle with the White Whale, on their way back to the Capital, Rem, Crusch, and the punitive expedition, bringing with them wounded soldiers and the Whale’s severed head, were ambushed by two Sin Archbishops.

Half of the expedition perished. The Demihuman mercenaries accompanying them retreated immediately and avoided annihilation.

Ferris: “When the Vice-Captain Hetaro brought the Capital’s knights back to the scene, the Sin Archbishops were already gone-nyan. Only our knights’ bodies and...”

Crusch: “People who were like me... right?”

Crusch furrowed her brows at Ferris’ last few words, biting her lip. With a dejected expression, she must have felt it was all her fault.

To her, the Crusch in Ferris’ story might as well be referring to another person.

Because—

Crusch: “My memory was erased... By a Sin Archbishop?”

Ferris: “Probably-nyan. I’ve attended to the other patients with the same condition as Crusch-sama. Their memories are completely gone, there is nothing Ferris’ healing magic can do-nyan. Even now Ferris has no idea what the cause is...”

Wilhelm: “Sin Archbishop, Gluttony. This Authority— it must be him.”

Wilhelm nodded gravely, and with a stern gaze he looked to Crusch. But, seeing Crusch shrivel under his gaze, Wilhelm closed his eyes in apology.

Wilhelm: “I was inconsiderate of Crusch-sama’s condition and frightened you. I am deeply sorry. I still have much to learn.”

Crusch: “No... I should apologize for being such a useless master... Even though I am trying my hardest to remember everything about Wilhelm-sama...”

Hearing Crusch call him Wilhelm-sama, the old swordsman cringed.

Seeing his sworn master suffering so, the guilt and shame of having failed to protect her brought pain onto Wilhelm’s face. Glancing toward Subaru, who at this moment must be carrying the very same feeling in his heart, Wilhelm seemed to understand him.

On the other hand, Ferris, whose attitude toward Crusch would not waver in spite of everything... seemed to disregard Subaru’s feeling completely.

Ferris: “Sin Archbishop of Sloth has been dealt with. And then there’s Gluttony and Greed. There is a limit to what can be done-nyan. Something so rare as two Sin Archbishops moving together, I’d be surprised if Emilia-sama’s rise has nothing to do with it.”

Emilia: “...Me?”

Her name suddenly mentioned, Emilia looked at Ferris with a surprised expression. Nodding to her, Ferris continued.

Ferris: “The Witch Cult will never tolerate the existence of a half-elf such as Emilia-sama. They are usually quiet and creep in the shadows, but now they’re all suddenly making such a ruckus, there is obviously a connection here.”

Listening to Ferris' speculations, Subaru crossed his arms, and pondered on a conversation they had before.

The night before the battle with the White Whale, when Subaru discussed with Ferris and Crusch the possibility of a Witch Cultist attack, they had accepted his suspicions readily. That means there must have been precedents...

Emilia: "But um... Even though I don't know much about the Witch Cult... The Witch refers to the Witch of Envy, right?"

Raising her hand nervously, Emilia uttered this entirely unexpected question.

Subaru doubted his hearing, Wilhelm and Ferris' expressions froze. The only people who weren't astonished by those words were Crusch, and Emilia herself.

Seeing their reactions, Emilia became even more nervous.

Emilia: "Sorry! I can tell from your reactions that that's something I should know, really, really, should."

Subaru: "But... Emilia-tan... you know about the Witch, you were the one who told me..."

The first time they met, she had given him the name Satella, and then after he had died, he tried to call her by that name again. His memory of her anger... meant that she knew that name was forbidden.

But Emilia shook her head at Subaru's words,

Emilia: "Near the forest where I lived there was a small village... they hated me because of my likeness to the Witch of Envy... So, I know how the Witch is regarded in the world, but things like the Witch Cult..."

Ferris: "How Emilia-sama lived in the past let's just put that aside for-nyan! But to say that you don't even know about the Witch Cult at this point is just too outrageous-nyan!!"

Shoulders raised, as if mocking, Ferris' hands flung up with a sigh.

Seeing this attitude from Ferris, Subaru's anger rose, and staring into Ferris' eyes he retorted.

Subaru: “How can you say this? To admit you don’t know something, do you realize how much courage that takes? To ask what is necessary, what is wrong with that?”

Ferris: “Subaru-kyun is really persuasive-nyan! You really are master and servant-nyan!”

Ferris relentlessly mocking Subaru’s unhidden displeasure, Subaru was about to stand up in anger— But,

Crusch: “Ferris. I cannot overlook what you just said. Apologize at once.”

The moment before Subaru’s strength injected into his legs, the words of reproach rang out in the room.

In her dark blue evening dress, up to now frail and timid, she transformed all of a sudden — majestic and fierce, her gaze was that of a knight.

Crusch: “As Natsuki Subaru-sama said, to ask what you do not know, is nothing deserving of mockery. Even you do not have that right. Understood?”

Ferris: “...Understood, Crusch-sama.”

Her forceful words subsiding, Crusch seemed to return to the soft-spoken girl of a moment before. But as if having heard something from the awe-inspiring Crusch of the past, from this now frail and feminine girl, Subaru could not hold in his astonishment. Ferris too, could not contain the shock within his eyes.

Ferris: “Emilia-sama, please accept my apology for my rudeness. Subaru-kyun too.”

Subaru: “You... N—no, it’s fine. Then, let’s talk about the Witch Cult now. Emilia-tan wants to hear it. And to be honest, I don’t know the details either...”

Seeing Subaru back down, half giving up, Ferris lightheartedly replied with an “Understood-nyan”. A finger lightly touching the lower lip, Ferris shook around in the short dress.

Ferris: “Firstly, as Emilia-sama said, the Witch Cult is an organization that worships the Witch of Envy. Ever since the unstoppable rise of the Witch four-hundred years ago, these fanatics have been active. To the Knights’ order, all affiliates of this organization are to be killed-on-sight.”

Emilia: “Killed-on-sight... How could you carry out such extreme orders?”

Ferris: “The Witch Cultists will not hesitate to burn a village or an entire city just to accomplish their goals. In fact, the village near Lord Roswaal’s mansion came close to falling victim to these Cultists, and one of the Sin Archbishops that took part in the ambush had once managed to single handedly capture a city in the Empire of Vollachia in the south.”

Emilia kept on blinking her eyes, as if unable to take in these facts. Subaru understands her reaction, because the horrors of the Witch Cult had already been carved deep into his heart.

He now uses Petelgeuse as the standard unit of measurement for insanity.

But in terms of strength, Greed sounds like something on a completely different level than Petelgeuse.

Ferris: “Wait, wait, I’m getting sidetracked-nyan... The Witch Cult Sin Archbishops, each named after one of the six Sins, other than Envy, are the executives of the organization.”

Emilia: “The six witches... were Sloth, Greed, Gluttony, Lust, Wrath and Pride, right?”

Ferris: “Yes, and especially well known among them are Sloth and Greed. Greed, as previously mentioned, is known for annihilating entire cities. Sloth, on the other hand, seemed to be behind every little disturbance caused by the Witch Cult. But Sloth has already been beautifully eliminated by our punitive expedition-nyan... Right, Subaru-kyun?”

Subaru: “Yes... Sloth is dead. I saw him disintegrate with my own eyes, there is no mistaking it.”

Subaru confirmed Ferris’ words, his mind playing back the final moments of the abominable Petelgeuse. Screaming Subaru’s name, full of hatred... Even long afterward, the sound would not leave his ears. Like a curse, it kept on howling...

—Was that the reason behind Subaru’s cruel fate?

Ferris: “There are now five remaining Sin Archbishops. Two of them were responsible for the ambush on Crusch-sama. Their movements are always mysterious, and so even after four-hundred years the efforts to eradicate them barely made any progress. As to their objective... It is said that they want to revive the Witch of Envy-nyan.”

Subaru: “Revive... the Witch?”

Unable to disregard these words, Subaru jumped up, tipping over his chair. Noticing this gave the girls a fright, Subaru waved his hands up and down.

Subaru: “To revive her... Is that even possible? The Witch has been dead for four-hundred years, right? To make something like that come back to life...”

Wilhelm: “Subaru-dono, the Witch of Envy is not dead. Her life is still preserved at the edge of this world. Unfortunately.”

To the agitated Subaru, Wilhelm quietly revealed this fact.

Speechless, Subaru looked to Wilhelm, and met his eyes, serious and severe.

Wilhelm: “Near the Great Waterfall, the Sealing Stone Shrine is located. The Witch is there, her indestructible existence sealed inside. For even with the power of the Dragon and the Sword Saint combined, she cannot be destroyed.”

Subaru: “Sealed... I might have heard that before... but to revive her, why don’t they just destroy the seal?”

Where did Subaru hear that before? But more importantly is the question...

...If the witch was sealed, they merely need to break the seal, but instead, every time a half-elf appears, they wreak havoc in the world with senseless murder and destruction. Just what is the Witch Cult trying to do? But at this question, Wilhelm shook his head.

Wilhelm: “To approach the temple is almost impossible. First, there is very little mana near the Great Fall, under those circumstances, no one can withstand the Witch’s Miasma. Secondly, they cannot bypass the Sage.”

Subaru: “Sage...?”

Wilhelm: “The Sage Shaula. Along with the first-generation Sword Saint, and the Divine Dragon Volcanica, these were the heroes who sealed the Witch. Then he/she⁷ retired to the Pleiades Watchtower near the

⁷ Shaula’s gender is unknown, but the Japanese is clear that Wilhelm is talking about Shaula alone, and not the Three Heroes.

Great Waterfall. But retired in name only, even now, for he/she is constantly watching, for those who would revive the Witch. —That is, as the story goes.”

Subaru: “They must be... quite old...”

Four hundred years is quite a long breath, even for Sages. But that is beside the point. Subaru decided to set that aside so Ferris could continue.

Subaru: “Well now we know why the Witch can’t be unsealed, but then how do they revive her?”

Ferris: “Even if you ask-nyan, Ferris isn’t a Witch Cultist and doesn’t know either. All we can do is torture a Witch Cultist and have them spit it out-nyan.”

Brushing off Subaru’s question, Ferris took on an “I give up” expression. Even though Subaru wasn’t satisfied, there was no point pursuing the question further. In any case, Emilia nodded.

Emilia: “So that’s... why I’m treated like this... But why didn’t Puck...”

Subaru: “Did Puck say something just now? There is a mountain of things I need to ask him!”

Emilia: “Puck didn’t respond... Even though he seems to have materialized... I only know he’s nearby...”

Seeing Emilia shriveling in her seat, it did not even occur to Subaru to say “there, there”. In fact, to talk to Puck is something he absolutely must do.

Besides, there is no way to predict where or when the Sin Archbishop of Greed will appear. Puck’s input will also be crucial.

Ferris: “That’s all there is to say about the Witch Cult-nyan. So, on top of that, let’s move the discussion to the future.”

Subaru: “The future...?”

Turning to Subaru with a clap, Ferris, with a jubilant smile, said

Ferris: “To put it simply, this Alliance... let’s dissolve it-nyan.”

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The atmosphere in the lounge froze. Only Subaru’s mind was heating up.

Taking in those words, he pondered a moment, quietly licking his lips.

Subaru: “Dissolve the Alliance? What are you trying to say?”

Ferris: “Exactly what it sounds like-nyan. As things are right now, our Alliance will not be mutually beneficial-nyan.”

Perhaps because Subaru kept his composure, Ferris’ expression revealed a touch of admiration.

Rather annoyed by Ferris’ expression, Subaru wondered if Ferris was setting up the Alliance as a bargaining chip to gain an advantage in the negotiation. The more he thought, the more he commanded himself to keep calm. But even so, his head was nearly boiling.

Subaru: “Mining rights aside, we coordinated our efforts to defeat the White Whale, and after everything is done, now you want to back out after reaping the benefits? That’s a bit scandalous no matter how you look at it.”

Ferris: “More detriment than benefits, Subaru-kyun.”

Subaru: “Ah?”

Compared to Subaru’s aggressive attitude, Ferris went on casually, wagging a finger.

Ferris: “Nyan? Gluttony and Greed appearing together, for starters. After killing Sloth, an Alliance with Emilia-sama’s camp will only make us targeted by the Witch Cult... Considering what happened to Crusch-sama... Do you still believe it’s in our interest to form an Alliance right now?”

Subaru: “That is...”

Glancing toward the completely different Crusch, Subaru hesitated to counter Ferris' argument. Because deep in his heart, he was carrying the same wounds.

This time, it wasn't Subaru who refuted Ferris' words.

Wilhelm: "I disagree, Ferris."

Leaning forward in his seat, Wilhelm's stern gaze stared into Ferris' eyes. Ferris, eyelids narrowed, let out an "Eh-?" with a thin smile.

Ferris: "What do you mean-nyan? After what Gluttony did to Crusch-sama, what do you think is the benefit of an Alliance that will draw the Witch Cult to us?"

Wilhelm: "To kill Gluttony... An opportunity to avenge our master."

Ferris: "Vengeance? Is that more important to you than Crusch-sama's life!?"

Against Wilhelm, Ferris refused to give ground.

Weighing heavily on both their minds, were thoughts of their master.

Ferris: "If we continue to deal with the Witch Cult this disaster will only repeat again! Crusch-sama right now can't even protect herself! When that day comes... If it's physical wound or emotional wound, Ferris can heal you... But if you die it's all over isn't it!?"

Wilhelm: "But we cannot remain idle while the offender roams free. Crusch-sama's memories, when we defeat the Sin Archbishop, there is a chance they will return. To give up this early, is far too rash."

Ferris: "Defeating that bastard will bring the memories back? I say, Wilhelm, to think lost memories can be brought back by killing the thing that ate it... Are you daydreaming or do you think this is some kind of fairy tale w—"

Wilhelm: "—Felix!!"

With an ear-splitting roar, the swordsman's aura resounded in the room. As if a gust of wind had swept in — was the sensation felt by everyone present.

All wincing from the shock, only Wilhelm's keen gaze remained intact.

Wilhelm: "Felix... What you said just now. Never utter it again in front of Subaru-dono."

Ferris: "...I'm sorry."

Called by his true name, twice, Ferris closed his eyes with grief and remorse.

The others turned their eyes to Subaru, who was already sitting once more. His hands clenched tightly, faintly trembling, blood seeped through the gaps between his fingers, as if about to cover them whole.

Subaru: "...Emilia-tan."

Emilia: "Don't worry... I won't say anything like «I understand» or «it's alright»... Even though I want to understand how you feel... that forgotten child... because I don't understand anything, no matter what I say, it won't be fair to you..."

Subaru looked up, into Emilia's violet pupils that flickered with sadness. In her eyes he saw a reflection of himself, in all his weakness... is that the Natsuki Subaru she sees?

As if saved by that tender regard, Subaru shook his head.

Subaru: "To say something like «it's alright»... even if I rip my mouth apart right now I won't be able say it. But I am fine. Ferris, don't worry about it. I... will not give up, as long as there is the tiniest fragment of hope left."

Ferris: "Really-nyan... Subaru-kyun sure doesn't like to give up..."

Watching Subaru trying to act like he was fine, Ferris' countenance broke down into a smile. But his position remained unchanged.

Ferris: "As for Ferris-nyan, I don't agree that we should continue the Alliance. I will return Crusch-sama to herself, just watch. So something like vengeance against Gluttony should just be set aside for nyow."

Wilhelm: "What we should do, and how... Crusch-sama, you must decide. It is not in our position to do it."

In the end, it all falls on her. Both their eyes focused upon her, and Crusch, as if understanding, nodded.

Crusch: “There is still plenty that I do not know. And what I was before, I cannot remember. I want to tell you now, that it will be disorienting, being around me... But even so, I thank you for placing in me your esteem, and trust. And if I could, I want to live up to that expectation. For that, I shall try my best.”

Despite losing her memory, it seemed her strength of character remained.

Just what is the essence of a person? Seeing Crusch like this once more, even after forgetting everything she knew, Subaru could not help but ask himself that question.

But as to the Alliance, there is no better choice than to put the negotiations on hold for now.

Ferris: “In any case, if the one who holds all the key information concerning Emilia-sama’s faction... Margrave Roswaal isn’t present, then there is nothing we can do-nyan. So for our next negotiation, let’s hold it on the condition that the Margrave be in attendance.”

Crusch: “Yes, that is for the best. Then this meeting...”

Ferris: “Will be a secret — So pretend it was about something other than an Alliance-nyan.”

Ferris shot a sharp glance at Subaru, saying this in an unusually low voice.

Subaru swallowed, but seeing no reason to disagree, he nodded. From their perspective, this decision made sense. If Crusch’s current condition is known to the public, her status as the most competent candidate will vanish.

In fact, the repercussions of Crusch’s amnesia becoming public knowledge is of the same magnitude as the prestige of slaying the White Whale. It is for precisely this reason that Anastasia wasn’t invited to this meeting.

Ferris: “Regardless of Julius, Anastasia will certainly use this information to her advantage. Good thing Crusch-sama’s condition hasn’t been seen by those kids of hers.”

Subaru: “...She will be present at the meeting these achievements will be discussed, what do we do about that?”

Ferris: “We can make an excuse and say she is unwell. Ferris will think of something. As for Subaru-kyun, your side just need to keep this secret, understood?”

Requesting only silence, Ferris would not allow any further entanglement between their two factions. Subaru, noticing this, only nodded.

In the end, the meeting concluded without any progress whatsoever.

Acknowledging the desperation of their situations, more than anything else, the two factions are aligned in the uncertainty of their futures.

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Subaru: “Thank you for back there, Wilhelm-san.”

After the meeting in the lounge, Subaru called out to Wilhelm outside the Karsten Mansion. Stopping in his steps, Wilhelm turned to Subaru.

Wilhelm: “Not at all. I was of no help, I’m ashamed of how deficient I am. Above all, I was unable to assist you today.”

Subaru: “Don’t say that, without Wilhelm-san, we wouldn’t have defeated the White Whale. And afterward I was able to entrust Emilia and the villagers to you. I am really really grateful!”

These were unpackaged, genuine words of gratitude. But even this could not lift the gloom from Wilhelm’s face.

Never forgetting a past kindness, always carrying the pain of others within himself. This man... isn’t he too good-natured for his own good? Subaru smiled at the thought.

Subaru: “Even though the situation hasn’t settled yet, have you had a chance to visit your wife’s grave? Even though it’s no consolation, but at least you avenged...”

Wilhelm: “—!”

At Subaru's words, Wilhelm's face suddenly collapsed with deep emotion.

Seeing those intertwined waves of grief and sentiment, Subaru didn't know what to do. Noticing Subaru's hesitation, Wilhelm bowed deeply.

Wilhelm: "Subaru-dono, I must apologize!"

Subaru: "Wait, don't be like this, you have nothing to be sorry about, I should be thanking you right now..."

Wilhelm: "No, that is not true. The words I spoke in the meeting were not out of genuine desire to be your ally. It was my vain, selfish sentiment that made me support the Alliance. For concealing my guilt, I am deeply ashamed."

Not understanding Wilhelm's words, Subaru furrowed his brows.

Seeing this, Wilhelm took off his overcoat, and rolled up his left sleeve - revealing a bandaged wound around his left shoulder. Through the outer cloth one could see that the inner layers are wet with blood.

Subaru: "Does it hurt? You should get Ferris to look at that."

Wilhelm: "This wound cannot be healed. It was dealt by an opponent who possessed the Divine Protection of the Death God.

Subaru: "Can't be healed? ...Then, Wilhelm-san!"

Even Subaru knows the outcome of an unhealable wound. Normally, if bleeding can't be stopped, it's like a timer being set on one's life. But unlike Subaru, who looked full of apprehension, Wilhelm shook his head calmly.

Wilhelm: "My life is not in danger right now."

Subaru: "How can that be? That wound... What kind of attack..."

Wilhelm: "I did not receive this wound today or yesterday. It was from a long time ago, and it recently reopened. But, for me right now, the wound is too large."

Listening to Wilhelm's quiet words, Subaru's small body quivered and contracted. Not knowing the reason behind that reaction, even the roots of his teeth felt like they didn't fit in his jaw. All this came from the Sword Demon in front of him, an incredible aura that could freeze one's liver solid. Continuing in his calm, gentle voice—

Wilhelm: "The effects of a Divine Protection becomes stronger, when the owner of the Divine Protection is near. When the owner of the Divine Protection of the Death God approaches, the wounds they inflicted will open."

Subaru: "Then that means... the person who inflicted your wound long ago... is near..."

Wilhelm: "The one who wounded my left shoulder... Is the Sword Saint of the previous generation."

Listening to Wilhelm, Subaru's breathing stopped. Gazing into Wilhelm's eyes, he saw the frozen glitters of emotion.

Wilhelm: "Thearesia van Astrea. The wound dealt by my wife has reopened. In order to find out why, I must continue to pursue the Witch Cult..."

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Lost in a daze, Subaru stepped into the room where Rem was sleeping.

Ever since returning to Crusch's mansion, whenever there is a chance, he would come to stay with her.

Even though he knew it would not happen, somewhere in his heart, in his weakness, he hoped she could just wake up.

In this state, he no longer had the courage or the will to face Emilia. Being Emilia, perhaps she would understand after all. If she was by his side now, it will only bring her pain. Unless Subaru looked for her, she would give him time to himself, even though she couldn't stop worrying.

If Emilia was here, he'd probably cry, if only to comfort that weakness within his heart. Though he hated that weakness, he could not cut it from himself.

Subaru: “Rem... Even though you told me I’m strong, I... without you with me, I can’t find it Rem... I can’t...”

Nothing changed from when he left for the lounge.

Softly breathing. Her heart was beating. But other than this, there was not a single sign of life. Right now, only Subaru’s heart still carries her existence. But,

Subaru: “—It’s you... which wind blew you here?”

Puck: “Me being here, is that so strange? Even I had some kind of relationship with this girl before, right? Then occasionally coming here, what’s wrong with that?”

Subaru: “Where do you get the nerve...”

Gently touching Rem’s sleeping forehead, Subaru glanced to his side — Floating in the air, was a small grey cat wagging his long tail, looking at him.

At the meeting he was nowhere to be found, yet he showed up here. Noticing Subaru’s severe glance, Puck seemed taken aback.

Puck: “Why’re you looking at me like that? Did I do something?”

Subaru: “...Right now, you didn’t do anything... Go find Emilia, as long as you go float around somewhere else.”

Puck: “Is that so? That’s a curious thing to say. Even though my freedom isn’t restricted, if that child gets in trouble while I’m not there...”

Flicking his whisker, Puck murmured leisurely. Then, floating up to Subaru’s face,

Puck: “But I think it’s better that I talk to Subaru right now.”

Subaru: “...Acting like you know everything, it’s really pissing me off.”

Subaru turned his gaze away. Even so, Puck silently waited for him. Subaru sighed, even though meekly following along annoyed him.

Subaru: “You didn’t tell Emilia about the Witch Cult... What are your intentions?”

Puck: “No intention at all, if you can live without knowing some things, then not knowing is fine too. If Lia asked me, I would have told her, but she didn’t ask... People like that, if you just avoid them then it doesn’t matter, right?”

Subaru: “Yes, there are times when it’s fine to not know some things. But this is totally not the case for Emilia is it!? That girl came out of the forest, to become the Monarch, she is fighting to win the Royal Selection! There is no way to avoid the Witch Cult like that. —You know this, of course you know this.”

Pressing low his voice, Subaru pursued Puck’s intentions. But Puck, wobbling in the air, easily dodged Subaru’s vigorous questions.

Puck: “The Witch Cult appearing... I suspected it too. But whether I would convey that to Lia is a completely different matter.”

Subaru: “Even if it meant endangering her, and everyone else around her!? I don’t know what you’re thinking, but if things went the way they were Emilia would have—!!”

Puck: “I see... You did all this to save Lia. This child too... She sacrificed herself to help her. In that case I really need to thank this child...”

Subaru: “—!”

In that instant, disregarding all the world, Subaru threw his punch.

At the Spirit in front of his eyes, without a trace of hesitation, he swung with all his might. The Spirit, easily avoiding his strike, washed its face with astonishment.

Puck: “What are you doing, all of a sudden?”

Subaru: “Don’t you dare touch Rem. Not with your hands, or your words...”

Surprised himself, his voice broke quietly. The emotions brewing in his heart, perhaps they became too impossible to bear.

With his round eyes, Puck gazed deep into Subaru, and with an “I understand”, he stretched his little body.

Puck: “I said something inconsiderate, sorry, I shouldn’t have said it. Instead of this... Let’s talk a bit about Gluttony.”

Subaru: “...Talk? What will that do now?”

Puck: “If you learn the nature of the thing that ate this girl’s name and memories, perhaps there is hope of fulfilling your wish, after all.”

Jumping at those words, Subaru’s face flung up. Seeing this reaction, Puck nodded, then he turned up his small pink nose as if searching for a memory.

Puck: “The Authority of Gluttony, to put it simply, is eating. When he eats a person’s name, all memories about this person is taken, and when he eats a person’s memories, that person’s own memories are taken. If both are taken, then the person becomes an empty shell. An empty shell won’t do anything and could not do anything. This girl’s condition, is just that.”

Subaru: “Name... Memory...”

Crusch’s memory. Rem’s memory and name.

Such is the effect of Gluttony’s Authority.

Subaru: “After killing the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony... Will the memories return...?”

Puck: “Ah, what would happen? Throw up everything that’s been eaten... even though I don’t like to think about it, is that something that can be done? You’ll need to ask the man himself...”

Subaru: “But the possibility exists, doesn’t it!? Rem’s memories, the possibility of retrieving Rem’s memories...!”

Turning back... Rem is still deep in her slumber.

Still softly breathing. Her heart was beating. Her body is still alive, only her memory, and her name, were eaten by that fiend.

Subaru: “Sin Archbishop of Gluttony— I will absolutely annihilate you.”

Puck: “Even though I still think it’s not that simple...”

Puck’s last few words didn’t enter Subaru’s mind.

Subaru, right now, is defending that final fragment of hope like the very last bastion in his heart.

—When he arrived in the Capital, he found Rem after the attack, and when he knew all was lost, without a shred of hesitation, Subaru stabbed a dagger into his own throat. What he felt at that moment, he could no longer remember. Everything had turned out so perfectly, so perfect beyond everyone’s expectations — But the truth is, throwing it all away in that instant, none of it mattered to him.

If he lost Rem, if it meant walking into a future without her, no matter how many times he must endure that pain, he will — Only this, Subaru clearly remembers.

Penetrating his throat, in blood, pain, searing heat, and loss, he lost all consciousness.

When he woke, what he saw was Rem lying in a bed.

The save point had moved forward. The place of return had changed. Subaru saw hell, and only hell.

Again! It must be some mistake; he must kill himself again... But Subaru hesitated. He was not afraid of pain or death. But he realized...

...Even if he returned to the previous save point, he could not save her.

At the save point before the battle with Petelgeuse, after the battle with the White Whale, Subaru and Rem had already went in separate directions for several hours. It is too late to catch them before the ambush. But even if he could, Emilia will be abandoned. And even if he sent the expedition to Emilia with the plan and rushed to the ambush, how will he defeat two Sin Archbishops?

To defeat Petelgeuse, Subaru’s presence is indispensable, and Emilia’s escape cannot be managed without Wilhelm’s protection.

To sacrifice Emilia to save Rem, or to sacrifice Rem to save Emilia — Without sacrificing one or the other he couldn’t save anyone at all.

Faced with this impossible choice, Subaru lowered the dagger from his throat.

Unlike being erased by the White Whale's mist, though forgotten by all the world, Rem's body remains here. Beside her, unable to do anything, he merely sat there in a daze...

But that time spent in cruel futility ends here. It ends now.

Holding Rem's sleeping hand, Subaru confirmed his resolve. Of one thing he is certain, he will—

Subaru: "Retrieve... Rem, I promise... I will retrieve your memories."

It was a promise. That right in front of your eyes, the man you fell in love with, will become the greatest hero the world has ever seen. We are still half-way on that path, aren't we?

Subaru: "I promise... Your hero will come for you. Wait just a little longer."

Lifting his face, teeth bared. It was a declaration of war.

The fiends shall regret the day they laid hands on what is sacred and inviolable.

For I, Natsuki Subaru, shall bring punishment upon you.

Subaru: "I will—I promise I will!"

In the days starting from zero, I can no longer endure a single one without the thought of you by my side.

So I must retrieve...

The days that are lost, the days I have walked with you, and all the days I will walk with you again... With my own hands, I swear I will take it back once more!

Arc 4 Chapter 1 - The Place They Returned To

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 10, Chapter 1 “At the Place of Return”, Parts 1-3

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#), [Part 4](#), [Part 5](#)

The grey gloom of the sky mirrored the state of Subaru’s heart.

In front of Crusch’s mansion, six dragon carriages lined up in a row. Those that fled from the Roswaal domain, the villagers of Arlam were all loaded up. Only the final special carriage was reserved for Subaru and Emilia.

The road will be long. So unlike the way here, they won’t be riding with the children, since there is a mountain of things he has to say to Emilia... And he wasn’t so insensitive as to let the children ride alongside her...

???: “This place will be rather lonely.”

Silently gazing at the dragon carriages, Subaru heard a voice from behind him.

Turning to see, it was Crusch looking at him. Her long green hair caressed by the misty wind, she closed her eyes, and seeing her, Subaru scratched his head.

Subaru: “It’s not like anything will happen if I stay here, I’d feel bad to just keep sponging on your hospitality – To be honest, I really should be taking some time to recover, but it can’t be helped.”

Opening and closing his hands, Subaru thought about the state of his health, and smiled awkwardly. Back then, it was to recover his health that he came to Crusch’s mansion in the first place. Roswaal had a hand in sending him here, and it still annoys him to see that clown’s wishes fulfilled so perfectly. As a matter of principle, even if he fulfills any of that guy’s wishes, it should be by continually stomping it.

Crusch: “Natsuki Subaru-sama, you know you’re welcome to sponge here as long as you like... Even though it’s hard to say that out loud.”

Subaru: “Thank you for your offer... but while I want to, there is still a pile of loose ends I need to tie up. There’s the White Whale, Sloth, and the whole deal with the Merchants’ Guild...”

Declining Crusch’s offer, Subaru shook his head. He was thinking of Julius and Anastasia. Out of the three factions that joined forces against the White Whale and Sloth, only Anastasia’s purely benefited.

Crusch’s camp, by slaying the White Whale, had accomplished a glorious feat four hundred years in the making – but Crusch’s amnesia was a devastating blow.

As for Subaru and Emilia’s camp that defeated Sloth, the supposedly well-informed Roswaal’s absence from it all doesn’t bode well at all. In terms of casualties, although they didn’t suffer heavy losses like Crusch’s camp, to Subaru, his loss was far too great to bear.

In comparison, only losing a portion of her mercenaries and supply trains, Anastasia’s forces are almost completely intact. And even though she wasn’t the main player in either battle, her forces made tremendous contributions with minimal losses, a highly profitable investment.

While the damage to their forces made the other two factions hesitate in publicizing their victories, it was not a concern for Anastasia. In order to check Anastasia’s ascent, close coordination between Crusch and Emilia’s factions will be necessary...

...Seeing Subaru deep in those thoughts, Crusch yawned lazily. Subaru’s brows frowned when he saw this, and Crusch, an embarrassed expression on her face, only waved “Nothing” with her hands...

Crusch: “That was truly womanish of me. Simply, being incapable of offering even the slightest aid to a benefactor leaves me entirely ashamed with my insufficient self...”

Subaru: “Instantly getting the debt repaid would be a nice story for the helper, but you don’t need to give that much consideration when you’re having a hard time yourself. Or really, I’ve already gotten my repayment.”

Says Subaru as he glances at the head of the line of carriages.

There stands clearly adorned with more ornamentation compared to the other carriages is a high-quality VIP vehicle, and the dragon pulling this honourable carriage is—

Crusch: “A story without greed. Healing a wounded dragon, and then wishing to adopt it.”

Subaru: “She’s the man who saved my life... or not, dragon. We haven’t known each other long, but she might be the partner I’ve skirted the line of death with the most in my life. Since it’d mean getting involved in my future troubles too, I figured it would be an unbearable idea from Patrasche’s perspective.”

???: “—I would find no need in being concerned on that matter.”

The soft denial of Subaru’s words as he glances at the earth dragon — Patrasche — comes from Wilhelm. The old swordsman had been checking the condition of Patrasche’s carriage until then, and he nods in recognition of his cutting in on their conversation.

Wilhelm: “Diana is the most difficult breed of ground dragons to please. To shield her master with her own body, Subaru must be quite adored by this ground dragon.”

Subaru: “Even though I don’t remember much, before the battle with the White Whale, I just decided to choose this one all of a sudden.”

It’s true they have a bond. This was more than fortunate, because if he picked any other ground dragon, whether it’s the White Whale or Petelgeuse, he would not have made it out alive. Anyway,

Subaru: “I can no longer be satisfied by any other ground dragon besides you... Ah, seductive Patrasche!”

Touching the smooth texture of the side of Patrasche’s stomach with the palm of his hand as if to show off his affections, Subaru looked into Patrasche’s rather pissed-off looking eyes. Reacting to Subaru’s overly intimate molestation, the ground dragon displayed with an expression of profound disgust from the bottom of its heart and jerked her body as if trying to break Subaru’s fingers.

Subaru: “Augh, close! Look, even if it’s to cover up your embarrassment, pulling that’s going too far. Ever since that time I put too much energy into classroom chores in middle school, this finger stuff makes my heart-rate go crazy! I’m so traumatized!”

Wilhelm: “The ground dragon is merely teasing you. Such amiable communication must be an indication of the unwavering trust between you two.”

Subaru: “Does that look like communication? It seemed to be just me offering my love one-sidedly and Patrasche rejecting me with her body language!”

That unspoken trust on the battlefield... is woefully absent right now. Now it's just a sassy attitude... But in the end, even with the cold demeanor, Patrasche allowed him to pet her. Anyway,

Subaru: “So I got my name into the credits for slaying the White Whale, and then I saved Emilia by killing Sloth. And now I got my beloved ground dragon... The reward is quite nice isn't it.”

Wilhelm: “Killing the White Whale, with how significant that was, Subaru-dono not realizing this is something admirable indeed. Perhaps one day the world will properly thank you for this great achievement. I look forward to that day.”

Subaru: “Yeah, I think so too! Wait... but wasn't I just running around the Whale's nose like bait all that time?”

To Subaru's not even humble words, Wilhelm looked on with a warm smile. His insides itching from that warmth, Subaru shook his head as if trying to get rid of that feeling.

Subaru: “All that aside... I won't be seeing you for a while Wilhelm-san. Please take care of your wound.”

Wilhelm: “Sorry I made you worry. It seems the distance is getting farther, the bleeding has stopped. But no matter what, the day when I fight alongside Subaru-dono again will come. Until then.”

Wilhelm's wound – the unhealable wound dealt by the previous generation Sword Saint, Thearesia van Astrea. Mentioning this brought a sharpness into Wilhelm's gaze. His mind turned to the Sin Archbishops that assaulted Crusch, Greed and Gluttony.

If the death of the Sword Demon's wife had to do with something other than the White Whale, these two are the most likely suspects.

Subaru, same as Wilhelm, holds a strong hatred for Gluttony. No matter what, they must eventually come face to face with this Sin Archbishop. While the Witch Cult is something they would rather avoid, Gluttony

is an entirely different matter. For they must defeat this Sin Archbishop to retrieve those irreplaceable things... Crusch's memory is one, and more importantly—

Ferris: "Subaru-kyun, Rem-chan is settled in, want to check?"

Saying this, from the carriage window poked out a head with cat-like ears — Ferris. Seeing Ferris step out of Patrasche's special carriage, Subaru walked over. Peeking in, in the spacious interior, some seats had been replaced with a makeshift bed, and on it, a girl was sleeping.

She was not wearing the familiar maid's dress, but wore a soft blue sleeping gown, that matched the color of her hair. A girl in an unwaking slumber, forgotten by all the world. She loved Subaru, and Subaru loved her. Perhaps, she was that kind of girl.

Subaru: "That thing is safe right?"

Ferris: "Hey, I've been careful, I am a healer-nyan. Though Rem's physical wounds are already healed, she is no longer a patient-nyan."

Silently, Subaru gazed at her sleeping face. Ferris' words were brash, but the side of Ferris' face showed something different from the usual playfulness. Perhaps Ferris was feeling the pain of his own powerlessness, not in regard to Rem, but Ferris' peerless master, Crusch.

Ferris: "You really want to bring her with you?"

Subaru: "Yes, I'll bring her with me. She won't get better by staying here... No I didn't mean it's your fau—"

Ferris: "I know-nyan, Subaru-kyun isn't that mean-nyan."

Seeing Subaru's embarrassment after his remarks, Ferris smiled awkwardly.

Ferris: "In fact."

Pointing a finger at Subaru,

Ferris: "Aside from Rem, an even bigger concern is Subaru-kyun isn't it?"

Subaru: “Me?”

Ferris: “Don’t play dumb-nyan, your gate is over-strained-nyan. While healing you I had to forcefully inject a large amount of Mana through your gate, it could be a bit damaged-nyan. Are you feeling weak or tired, physically and magically?”

At Ferris’ question, Subaru turned his neck and shoulders. Spinning around, he couldn’t find anything wrong. He jumped a bit and there seemed to be nothing to worry about.

Subaru: “No problem. Both the used parts and the unused parts are fine. Putting the gate aside, I don’t usually use magic anyway.”

Ferris: “You’re not a magic user after all. If it’s Ferris, Ferris would have to avoid using magic except in emergencies-nyan... en, that’s good-nyan.”

Seeing Subaru aloof to the critical condition of his health, Ferris gave up. With wide, round eyes, Ferris looked around Subaru’s neck, pulling around his collar.

Ferris: “But no more straining yourself. Even though Ferris can squeeze out every toxin from Subaru-kyun’s body, if your gate shatters into a thousand pieces Ferris won’t be able to fix it-nyan. So take the time to properly recover it... about two months-nyan.”

Subaru: “Two months without magic... for a guy who didn’t use magic for fifteen years, it’s nothing!”

Joking around after hearing the diagnosis... come to think of it, Subaru hasn’t even been in this world for two months, even though from his perspective it was more like four months – it all feels like a very long time.

Thinking about all that happened since he came to this world, how hard would it be to finally rest for two months? He wasn’t sure himself.

Subaru: “Eh... Although I do always manage to get myself caught up in some disaster... Wait, did I just trigger an event flag!? I think I heard the sound effect!!”

Ferris: “Too bad, Ferris is no expert on treating brain problems-nyan.”

Subaru apparently appalled by his own remarks, Ferris looked at him rather disinterestedly.

Affected by this reaction, Subaru decided this conversation should be coming to an end. After some thought, he reached out his hand to Ferris.

Ferris: “Nyan?”

Subaru: “No, I really should thank you for everything you’ve done to help me. For healing me, and when we’re against the Whale and Sloth if it weren’t for you, it would’ve all been a mess... and for Rem, thank you.”

Ferris: “...Nyan. You don’t seem to be mocking me-nyan, so be it.”

Subaru: “Ooo! My ability *Kuuki Yomenai*⁸ has activated! Stay calm!”

A clumsy expression of thanks, but Ferris seemed to like it. In any case, his feelings got through. Ferris held onto the out-reached hand, and they shook.

Subaru: “Such soft, slender fingers... I can’t imagine what you’d be like with masculine hands.”

Ferris: “On the cute and perfect Ferris, wouldn’t that be too disappointing-nyan? Be it body hair or skin, everything on Ferris is all natural-nyan.”

Ferris raising a hand with pride, Subaru caught a glimpse of the impeccable white legs under Ferris’ skirt. Taking in the sheer beauty of its form, Subaru’s shoulders dropped dejectedly.

Subaru: “But, he’s a guy⁹...”

Ferris: “Yep, Ferris is a man in body and soul-nyan.”

Subaru: “How do you get so smug about it? Which part of that is like a man?”

Dressed like a beautiful girl, calling Ferris a man is just too much — Although Subaru isn’t traditional or anything like that, even he knew Ferris’ behavior is the opposite of what would be called manly.

⁸ English flip. Means “(to) not read the air/mood” (空気が読めない), originally “ノット・エア・リーディング” (*notto ea ridingu*).

⁹ Veiled Steins;Gate reference, perhaps.

Against Subaru's question, Ferris placed a finger on the corner of those lips. And with a charming shake of the waist,

Ferris: "Because, Crusch-sama said this suits Ferris, what I am, I am, and this most suits the radiance of Ferris' soul. —Crusch-sama's words, Ferris shall repay with everything that I am."

Subaru: "But..."

"...The current Crusch doesn't know this", he started but Subaru held back his words. Even if he doesn't say it, Ferris already knows. And if he does say it, it will only hurt.

Subaru, more than anyone, would hate to do this. If someone talked about Rem, Subaru would be just as agitated. Perhaps Ferris knew this as well.

Ferris: "—The House of Karsten be damned."

Subaru: "...?"

Suddenly, the voice struck Subaru's eardrums. Quiet, cold, a voice of frozen emotion. Who that voice belonged to... If he heard it now, it would still give him pause.

Head lowered, Ferris' expression is hidden behind the hair of his forehead, impossible to see. In this way, Ferris held tight onto Subaru's hand.

Ferris: "Only Crusch-sama, I will protect with my life."

Subaru: "...Ferris?"

Ferris: "Sooooooooo!"

In front of the dumbfounded Subaru, Ferris' head suddenly lifted, smiling with a jubilant voice. But compared to the playful, mischievous eyes Subaru was so used to seeing, in this instant, it appeared as if those eyes were lying.

Ferris: "Remember the agreement, Subaru-kyun! Otherwise all the Mana in your body will go on a rampage frying your brain until you die-nyan."

Subaru: “What are you saying with that smile on your face!? And why are you threatening an ally!?”

Ferris: “Threatening? More like a death sentence-nyan.”

Subaru: “Worse than I thought!”

Flinging Ferris’ hand out of his own, Subaru turned away. For a brief moment, in all this commotion... he faintly hoped perhaps Rem would react. Sighing slightly, he pushed his dashed hopes out of his mind.

Near the luggage outside the dragon carriage, he found Emilia and Crusch talking.

Emilia: “Ah, Subaru. Is Rem-san’s bed prepared?”

Subaru: “Yep, Ferris set it up perfectly. Behold! This is me and Patrasche’s Great Circus Combo! We’ll show you something even the Great Kinoshita Circus wouldn’t be able to show you!”

Emilia: “Even though I don’t know what you’re talking about, I got a bad feeling about this... Let’s not do the Great Circus.”

Subaru: “The sky! It’s too unfortunate! But my heart had already been beating up and down expectant of Emilia-tan’s misattribution of arousal!”

Subaru called it the “In this speeding carriage my life is in danger, could this increase in heartbeat be LOVE!?” self-directed battle plan.

But to hear Emilia say Rem-san... A piercing pain of unfathomable degree lingered in Subaru’s heart, refusing to disappear.

For an instant, Emilia’s eyes caught onto Subaru’s mouth, which had suddenly stopped moving. But before her words came out, Ferris came up behind Subaru.

Ferris: “Well, the dragon carriage is prepared-nyan. Sorry it took so long-nyan. It’s sad to say goodbye — Crusch-sama, anything to say?”

Crusch: “En, yes.”

Ferris went to Crusch's side. Subaru went to Emilia's. Taking them both within her sight, Crusch took a deep breath, and placed a hand in front of her chest.

Crusch: "First, though I have said it many times before, you have my deepest gratitude. Even though I can no longer remember, I know that before I lost my memory, I wanted us to cooperate, and to be friends. I thank you once again."

Emilia: "No... I, Crusch-sama, there is nothing to thank me for. These days I've only been kept in the dark and left out of everything..."

Subaru: "En, it's true Emilia-tan didn't do anything. But I have everything handled so don't worry. After all, my achievements are my Emilia-tan's achievements too!"

Seeing Emilia shriveling in embarrassment, Subaru pounded his chest proclaiming this. Stealing a glance at Subaru, Emilia nodded slightly.

Emilia: "Thank you Subaru... Even though I don't remember becoming «your» Emilia..."

Subaru: "M-my battle plan to "subconsciously inject impression of a romantic relationship into third party listeners" has been seen through...!?"

Emilia: "Because I was listening carefully... Oh, sorry about that."

All the air pressure deflating from his chest, Subaru sank down, and Emilia apologized to Crusch, who was quietly observing their amiable exchange.

Crusch: "No, the relationship between you two seem wonderful. I must quickly work to return to the way I was with Ferris and Wilhelm."

Ferris: "Ferris will always be open to Crusch-sama in both body and soul-nyan!"

Ferris, covering his cheeks with both hands, swerved left and right. While Ferris was swerving like an octopus behind her, Crusch seemed to accept it as it is, with a warm, even feminine, smile emerging on her face.

Crusch: "We will meet again very soon, I think, Emilia-sama and Subaru-sama. I wish we would forever be friends."

That was not a lie, it must have been her true thoughts... Subaru thought this.

Despite losing her memory, she did not lose the nobility of her heart. Honesty illuminates her conduct, false flattery and lies are not compatible with that.

Perhaps because that came through so clearly, Emilia's eyes opened wide with surprise, her lips trembling faintly.

Emilia: "I am... For Crusch-sama, I am an opposing Candidate. The Alliance... one day it will return to competition between us."

Crusch: "En, that is true. With Emilia-sama as an opponent, I will take care not to fall behind, so I will do my best as well."

Emilia: "And even without that, I am a half-elf. With silver hair... Doesn't it scare you?"

Subaru: "Emilia-tan, that's..."

She didn't need to ask that, Subaru thought, trying to stop her. Seeing the desperate determination on the side of Emilia's face, he knew this conversation mustn't continue.

Emilia was serious, in asking that question. The emotional part of her knows she should never bring up her identity lightly. Above all, to bring it up in front of Crusch Karsten. Subaru knew, to let this continue would be...

Crusch: "The soul determines the value of its own existence. For myself, and for others as well, to live with the soul's fullest radiance, unashamed, is the way we should live."

Emilia: "—"

Crusch: "Somehow it feels like I've said that many times before. How should I say it... Now that I've listened to myself, that was pretty sophisticated, wasn't it?"

Crusch covered her mouth and couldn't hold in her laugh. Hearing this, Emilia stood dumbfounded, and did not say a word.

Crusch: "Emilia-sama, are you ashamed of the way you carry out your life?"

Emilia: "...I'm not. Even if everyone around me thinks so, as long as I am not hated by myself, I can carry on and live this way."

Crusch: "If so, then don't regret anything. Improve yourself, try your hardest, and stay true to the self you deserve. —You have a beautiful soul."

Smiling, Crusch extended the hand in front of her chest toward Emilia.

Crusch: "To get to know you, I am happy. Fear? Not a single bit."

Biting her lips, Emilia carved those words into her memory, her chest hurting with emotion. She gazed at the outstretched hand. Crusch patiently waited for her. Then, Emilia's fingers met the palm of Crusch's hand, and they exchanged a handshake softly.

Crusch: "No matter what, I expect we will meet again soon."

Emilia: "M-me... no. Me too, this time I should stand tall in front of Crusch-sama, shouldn't I? Until then, I wish you the best of health."

This way, the two fellow Candidates of the Royal Selection, their promise to each do their best, was sealed.

Looking on from the side, Subaru's heart swelled with the sense of accomplishment. That was one of the goals of Subaru's struggle after struggle... Even though in the end it's impossible for everything to be perfect...

Subaru: "...After everything we accomplished... Why do I still have this sad expression on my face? I don't want to blame it on you... I don't..."

Glancing back at the carriage, the image of the girl sleeping inside rises beneath Subaru's eyelids. He couldn't forgive himself for using Rem as a reason to look downwards during a situation that should've been a blessing. Rem wouldn't have wanted anything like that — though, him thinking like that was more than likely his ego.

Crusch: "Natsuki Subaru-sama, please take care. I will look forward to your future activity... and her recovery."

Subaru: “Much more activity from me... I don’t think that’s a good idea... To be honest, I’m the kind of guy that runs around trying to do everything as the last resort and still ends up being completely useless. About Rem... Miss Crusch is not an outsider. No matter what, she will recover. I promise, she will.”

Crusch extended her hand to Subaru. But to shake hands in this state, isn’t that way too embarrassing? To cover up his embarrassment, Subaru gave her a high five. A small sound rang out, and the brief contact between Subaru and Crusch’s hands ended. Her hand bouncing off, Crusch’s eyes blinked ever so slightly.

Crusch: “We will certainly meet again.”

With these words, the master and servant bowed, seeing Subaru and Emilia off.

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On the road home, a strange, stifling gloom descended on the dragon carriage.

This Patrasche-drawn carriage given to them as repayment was most likely another symbol of Crusch’s thanks – Even disregarding its ornamentation it is clearly of expensive make, the softness of its seating and glamour of its décor crossing the line for a lack of calm.

Nearly ten people could board and the spacious carriage would likely still have room to spare, and with only three people occupying the space the overwhelming vacancy is a natural result. The ones guarding over the silence in the carriage are Subaru and Emilia, as well as a sleeping Rem.

No urge strikes Subaru to part from the Sleeping Beauty’s side, and Emilia’s absence of talk is perhaps also her manner of consideration for the unconscious Rem. Consequently the only atmosphere that floods though the carriage is unpleasant.

Subaru: “...Hm.”

This is bad, Subaru thought, crossing his arms. Though it’d be outrageous to have a lighthearted conversation under these circumstances, there is so much they need to talk about. They have to decide on their stance regarding the Royal Selection, they need to get up to date on the Alliance with Crusch’s faction, and they still haven’t even talked about what happened over the past few days.

Then there was Rem. How would she be taken care of at the mansion if only Subaru remembers her? Even though it's inevitable, just the thought of what Ram might say, when she sees the unconscious Rem, sends shivers down his spine.

Emilia: "I know you're worried, but right now I feel the atmosphere might have been better if the kids were riding with us..."

Of course, the children were also in the entourage heading back to Roswaal's domain. But they are riding with their parents right now. If they asked about Rem, it would be difficult to explain, and what if the villagers think it's a disease... Unfortunately, the result is the current silence.

What to do now — It is unusual for Subaru to feel so restrained, he looked up at the ceiling thinking.

???: "I don't know what, but can't you two think of something to talk about!? Aaaah, I can't take this awkward silence anymore!!"

Subaru: "What are you saying!? Sneaking in out of the blue!? Wait, were you there all along?"

Otto: "That's rude! Of course I was here! Do you even remember the conditions under which I agreed to help you out!?"

Otto said in an over-exaggerated way, sticking his head into the carriage from the opening in front, sending a bit of spittle flying along with his voice. Otto was the one driving the carriage, sitting outside in the driver's seat. He stuck his head through the hole connecting to the carriage's interior just to comment on the quietness inside the carriage.

At Otto's objections, Subaru tilted his head and nodded while muttering "Ah, ah."

Subaru: "I remember, I remember. Right, I remember you asked me to help you meet Roswaal, right? ... Ah, but, what can I say..."

Otto: "What is it!?"

Subaru: "Well if you're just chasing after guys it's one thing, but when the guy is Roswaal... I'm straight by the way, and I already have Emilia, so please don't come after me."

Otto: "That's not why I want to talk to him at all! What do you think I am!?"

Subaru: “A trader looking for some excitement?”

Otto: “Why do you treat me like a pervert!?”

Looking at Otto as if pitying him from the bottom of his heart, Subaru shook his head sadly from side to side. Emilia, who had been quietly observing their conversation, suddenly opened her eyes wide and said with a surprised expression,

Emilia: “You two... are really good friends, aren’t you? I’m surprised!!”

Subaru: “Oy, oy Emilia-tan. Please stop it with the jokes. Putting me in the same basket as this money-grubbing merchant... The only thing I’m greedy for is your love!”

Otto: “You’re greedy too then!! Ah, wait, I’m not greedy to begin with!”

Subaru: “Otto, shut up.”

Sighing at the travelling merchant, Subaru got up and took hold of the flap to close the window to the driver’s seat.

Otto: “Ah, wait, don’t just treat me like I’m in the way!”

Subaru: “Ok, shutting you out!”

Pulling the flap shut with a clap, the face of the man who had been trying until the very end to say something finally disappeared. Joining his fingers and stretching his arms like someone who had just completed a rough task, Subaru turned around to see Emilia blankly looking up at him.

Subaru: “...Puh.”

Emilia: “Hihahaha!”

Looking at each other’s faces, they suddenly burst out laughing.

For a while they let themselves be taken along by their laughter, but after a little while, their laughter started to wane, until silence once again descended upon the carriage.

At that moment,

Subaru: "Letting this heavy atmosphere be, really isn't like me, is it?"

Emilia: "You're right, it's not like you at all. The Subaru I know is a much more spirited, unreasonable, lively person. So much so that no matter what I'm feeling at the moment, he completely blows all my bad feelings away."

Subaru: "I feel like that could also be translated into an airhead who can't read the mood..."

In any case, Otto being there had actually cleared up the mood tremendously. Thanking Otto for this would probably make him angry, but nevertheless, Subaru thanked him in his mind while getting up and sitting down next to Emilia as if it were the most natural thing in the world. Seeing this put a wry smile on Emilia's face.

Emilia: "You always just naturally sit next to me huh, Subaru?"

Subaru: "Well, it's natural for someone to want to sit next to the girl they like, so I want to sit as close as I can and breathe the same air as you."

Emilia: "Geez, the first half of that sentence was embarrassing, and yet somehow the second half of that sentence gave off a really bad feeling."

Being hit straight with an earnest confession of love made Emilia's face turn red, but the depravity of the second half made her scowl. Leaning his head toward her at her reaction, Subaru said,

Subaru: "Hmm, I was just trying to act like I always do, you know."

Emilia: "Come to think of it, I guess you've always been like this. It's because you're like this, that I'm never able to just take in what you're saying..."

As Emilia looked at him, her voice turned into a quiet mumble, then faded completely. Subaru scratched his head, considering whether or not he should pick up the conversation...

Subaru: "Guys just can't mentally handle being straightforward, and not pretending to be kidding around when it comes to this sort of thing. Me loving Emilia-tan, me looking at Emilia-tan in a perverted way, and me wanting to help Emilia-tan are all my true, honest feelings. You can believe that you know?"

Emilia: "I believe it, but believing and accepting are two different things..."

Subaru: "That's fine with me, believe me, and I'll work hard until you accept my feelings."

Thinking about it again, that was a pretty aggressive proclamation. In fact, hearing that from Subaru, Emilia's face was blushing.

Fighting hard to remain unflustered, her cheeks and ears already turned so red that her expression couldn't keep up. She must never have had anyone confess their unconditional fondness for her before. Of course Subaru, the one trying to hit on her, didn't have any experience either, so his face was also completely red. Even so,

Subaru: "Rather than walking on with a downcast expression, this is more like me. Right, Rem?"

Emilia: "...Just now, did you say something?"

Subaru: "I wanna pick up that pretty hair of yours and ogle the back of your neck so hard, Emilia-tan."

Emilia: "Right there, you are trying to distract me again... You care a lot about Rem-san, don't you?"

Subaru still trying to wisecrack his way out, Emilia's incisive words blocked his escape. Accepting defeat, Subaru smiled bitterly, and turned toward Rem, still sleeping on the bed.

Subaru: "I do, yes. Immensely... I care about her. I'm always thinking I must do something, and I think, and I want to keep on thinking. Even though I wanted Emilia-tan to be the first in my thoughts, this can't be ranked... I'm sorry."

Emilia: "I'm not a bad child that will get angry and throw a tantrum. I won't get angry about something so important... I can tell just by looking, she is very important to Subaru."

Like Subaru, Emilia turned her narrowed gaze to Rem in her sleep. Her lips trembled. Then after a short moment of hesitation, she asked,

Emilia: "You... like her. Don't you?"

Subaru: "I like her. I love her. I love her as much as I love you."

Emilia: "I don't know how I feel about this, but... Subaru, are you the kind of guy that flirts around?"

Subaru: “I thought I was supposed to be a pretty faithful guy, but having someone be so devoted to you is... a guy whose heart isn’t moved by that, I don’t think he could have a drop of blood or tear in him.”

Thinking back to the loops over the past few days, he remembered, how many times he had received Rem’s unconditional love. Receiving it all, how could his heart not move? By the time he noticed, her existence inside his heart had already grown far too large to ignore.

Emilia: “Even though you told me that you love me.”

Subaru: “Just to make it clear, I love Rem a lot, but Rem still loves me way more, you know? She’s completely fallen head over heels for me, and I seriously can’t understand why.”

Hugging his shoulders, he wondered how she could love him so selflessly. To be loved this much by a girl like Rem, was he really worth it?

He still couldn’t help but wonder why. But even so... as the man she fell for, the very least he could do, is to try to live up to what she sees in him. Seeing Subaru’s downcast self-appraisal, Emilia’s lips relaxed.

Emilia: “I think I understand her.”

Subaru: “Huh?”

Emilia: “The reason Rem-san came to really love you. I’m sure it’s because she got to see Subaru’s good side up close, a lot. You’re kind of like a disease that sometimes becomes really incredible, and does some really incredible things.”

Subaru: “A disease? I... can’t actually deny that.”

Subaru scratched his cheek and pouted, showing his dissatisfaction. Emilia, unaffected, held her stern expression as if to say, “It’s true you know”, then, closing her eyes...

Emilia: “I won’t fall for you that easily you know.”

Subaru: “That makes the effort all the more worth it! One day, I will make Emilia-tan go all gooey and fall for me, wake Rem from her sleep, and settle this in a nice way. Aaaaah, I’m smiling just thinking about it!”

To have Emilia and Rem each pull on one of his hands, fighting over his one and only body. That would be a such a blissful, incredible sight. Which is why definitely, definitely one day—

Subaru: “I’ll have you two pull me until I split into a thousand pieces!”

Emilia: “I have no idea what you’re thinking, but I feel like I have to say this: “I’m not going to do anything like that!”

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After that conversation, the discussion inside the carriage went on smoothly.

After all, they’ve been waiting for the larger half of a day to talk. And since there was a lot they had to talk about, they had only just enough time to do it.

Sharing everything about the past few days with Emilia, eventually Otto joined their conversation as well, and even took part in their planning for the future. To sum it up,

Subaru: “Basically, if we don’t meet with Roswaal then we can’t plan anything, right?”

After all that, the conclusion was the same as the starting point of the conversation.

Roswaal is the only person who understands the full capabilities and powers of the Emilia Camp, so nothing can proceed without him.

Subaru: “Well, if Ram, who went to the Sanctuary, met Roswaal, we could naturally get him to return to the Mansion. But I’d slap him in the face first, before we have a good talk with him.”

Otto: “You’re very aggressive toward your employer, huh, Natsuki-san?”

Subaru: “I think I have a right to do that after all he did! He’d deserve every bit of it!”

Thinking back on the mess Roswaal left for Subaru to clean up, this is more or less an appropriate response. In fact, Emilia didn’t seem to have any intention of stopping Subaru, as if permitting him to do it just this one time.

As their discussion was summed up and their topic turned toward matters of the Roswaal domain, their dragon carriage left the forests and entered the village—

—they instantly realized something was wrong.

The village that Subaru had gotten so used to seeing, seemed just as desolate and dreary as right after the battle with Petelgeuse. There was not even any sign of the soldiers of the expedition that stayed behind.

To put it simply, it seems none of the villagers had returned.

Otto: “I don’t see anyone, Natsuki-san. It doesn’t look like the area was devastated or anything, it just looks like nobody is here.”

Getting off the dragon carriage, Otto voiced his thoughts as he looked around the village with several of the returning villagers. Even Subaru, who looked with a different group, came to the same conclusion.

In the somber silence, memories of past loops — where the villagers were slaughtered, massacred by Petelgeuse’s fingers, suddenly struck Subaru like a nightmare returning. But he was certain that he was just overthinking it.

But then, that raises another question.

Subaru: “Ram said from here to the Sanctuary is only about seven to eight hours... But then why are they later than us, if we stayed in the Capital for three days?”

Otto: “They might not know that we took down the Witch Cult, so maybe they’re being cautious?”

Subaru: “Roswaal abandoning his lands? I assume if Roswaal fought Sloth face-to-face, Roswaal would probably win. Even if it isn’t Sloth’s style to fight in the open, Roswaal should have at least come here to scout.”

Roswaal, who can even fly, could easily return to his territory. If he intended to, he could scout the perimeters of the Mansion for any remaining threats, and ensure the land was safe to return to. But he didn’t.

Subaru: “Either he’s being overly cautious or...”

Emilia: “Something’s happened in the Sanctuary?”

Both Subaru and Emilia’s opinions matched. Looking at each other, they shared a nod.

No matter what, they have to find out what the situation at the Sanctuary is.

Besides their concerns, the villagers had worries of their own.

After all, about 60% of the villagers had headed for the Sanctuary. Those that returned from the Capital: the children who resolved to accompany Emilia, their parents, and the young men’s militia that went with them, only comprised about 40% of the villagers. Without the rest, the functioning of the village is severely affected.

Besides, the people’s minds tend to always turn to the worst.

Subaru: “Anyway, we have to do something... For now, let’s head back to the Mansion. I want to settle Rem down as well. Plus, Otto, you don’t have anywhere to stay, so come to the Mansion with us.”

Otto: “What!? To trouble the Ma-Margrave for lodging!? If I have to be in such a heck of a situation, I would rather sleep in the dragon carriage!”

Subaru: “Shut up, you’re already involved. Better get used to it because I’ll use you until you die off!”

Ignoring Otto’s objections, Subaru said goodbye to the villagers and told Patrasche to head for the Mansion.

In a distance of fifteen minutes on foot, and five minutes by carriage, lies the nostalgic Mansion of Roswaal.

Last time, he didn’t have the chance to appreciate the sight, so when he looked up at it again, this time, there was something emotional about it all.

Subaru: “Well, nothing seems to have changed... Ram and the others don’t seem to have returned, either.”

Emilia: “But, Beatrice must still be inside. I hope she knows where the Sanctuary is.”

Subaru: “Wha- really? Crap... I thought Emilia-tan would know where the Sanctuary is. Then how do we confirm if Roswaal’s alright?”

The fundamental objective of their plan collapsing, Subaru furrowed his brows at the looming darkness ahead.

Emilia’s beautiful face also showed the colors of grief. Otto, unable to join in the conversation, only looked up, enchanted by the great Mansion and its surroundings, as if driving through a dream.

Subaru: “Tch. Crap. Well, we just have to hope Beatrice knows something about it.”

Otto: “Hey, why were you clicking your tongue while staring right at me?”

Subaru: “Tch. It’s your self-consciousness. No one cares about you as much as you think.”

Otto: “Wow that’s a terrible comment!”

Ignoring the partially depressed Otto, Subaru parked the dragon carriage in the front yard, and headed straight to the entrance.

First, get Beatrice, then, scout the Mansion, then, secure a bed for Rem, then think of future plans again—

Subaru: “I’m back, Roswaal’s Mansion! Here comes my nostalgic h...”

Saying that, pushing open the grand door, Subaru’s voice clogged up.

Because what greeted him was a completely different sight than what he expected.

The entrance hall was spread with gorgeous carpets, in the corners of the stairs leading to the upper floors were expensive looking vases filled with colorful flowers. From the ceiling, hung beautiful crystal lamps that could be the chandeliers of this parallel world. The familiar entrance hall... was very much different from what he expected. Instead of what he expected—

Subaru: “It’s not even vandalized... it’s actually arranged!?”

The mats were straightened nicely without a single crease, and the flowers in the vases in the corners of the stairs were blooming vibrantly, the chandeliers were delicately taken care of and were shining graciously, even more than usual.

Stunned by this surreal scene, Subaru lost his words and stood still. Because of his amazement, his reactions were all too slow.

Subaru: “—Who is it!?”

A small, weak, almost inaudible sound. Subaru frantically shot his glance toward its direction.

But, when he noticed the shadow, it was already too late. The shadow had already run up behind him and then—

Subaru saw it. From behind him, as if eclipsing the moon, the shadow engulfed him whole.

In that shadow... A mouth filled with white fangs, as if of a beast, were clear in the back of his eyes.

—And in the next moment, before he could even realize... Subaru’s consciousness, and his world, had been dragged to darkness.

Arc 4 Chapter 2 - Insults and Gratitude

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 10, Chapter 1 “At the Place of Return”, Part 4

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#)

—Oy, Subaru, dying here would be pretty miserable.

Still muddled, lying there shaking his head, Subaru lifted himself up and looked around.

He was usually good at waking up, but the reason he couldn't get his thoughts together was simply because he wasn't exactly sleeping. He tried hard to remember what had happened before he lost consciousness, but the first thing that occurred to him was that he was in a very familiar room.

Subaru: “This is the Mansion's living room... isn't it?”

???: “Oh, Subaru, you're finally awake?”

A voice mumbled as if trying to make sure, then the door opened, and Emilia's face poked through.

Her silver hair in a braid, she had a slightly bright expression on her face as she walked over to Subaru on the couch, and bending over, she met his gaze.

Being stared at so intently by her wide, round eyes, Subaru shrank down a little.

Subaru: “Uhm, Emilia-tan, what happened?”

Emilia: “We heard you scream as soon as you entered the mansion. Otto and I were reeeeeeeally shocked. Then when we ran inside to see...”

Subaru: “I, was sleeping?”

Emilia: “Saying it like that is a little deceiving... But it's not technically wrong, I suppose?”

Emilia put a finger to her lips, and tilted her head slightly to the side. There was no sense of urgency in her reply.

Scrambling when he just woke up, now seeing her in this relaxed manner, Subaru realized there was no emergency. Yet even so, he couldn't shake the feeling that something was out of the ordinary. He was certain that just before he lost consciousness, some kind of animal with sharp fangs had—

???: “Emilia-sama, might I have a moment?”

There was a knock on the door from the outside, followed by the sound of a woman's voice calling out to Emilia. Looking in the direction of the voice, she gave her assent with a small “Sure”, and the door opened slowly.

Looking at the door casually opening, Subaru couldn't help but feel mystified.

—I don't recall ever hearing that voice before.

His doubt was soon confirmed when he saw what stood just outside the doorway.

???: “I brought drinks and additional hand towels— Oh, I see you are awake already.”

The form of the smiling woman imprinted itself into Subaru's eyes.

It was a woman with long, almost translucent blonde hair, the lines of her back were in perfect posture. Her appearance and behavior were in every way refined, and in her fluid motions there was not a hint of unnecessary movement.

She was wearing the same familiar outfit as other servants of the Roswaal Mansion — The cute and practical maid's uniform, with not so much as a crease or wrinkle visible.

The plate in her hands held a water pitcher and hand towels, which she placed softly down on the stand in the center of the room without making a sound. If she were being scored, she would have passed with flying colors...

...That is, only if you overlooked her ferocious-looking physique and her fiendish smile.

The uniform may be worn perfectly, but the one wearing it was slightly taller than Subaru, with an athletic build similar to his. If she were a he, it would have seemed healthy and strong, but when it was on a female, everything instantly crumbled.

What's more, the smile at the end of her perfectly fluid motion — was completely ruined by the set of sharp fangs peeking out through the corner of her mouth. Looking even closer, there was something unnatural about the sharpness of her gaze, and her green pupils seemed to give off a glinting light, like a carnivorous, feline beast eyeing its prey.

Frederica: "It is a pleasure to meet you. I am a servant of the household of Margrave Roswaal L. Mathers, Frederica Baumann..."

Subaru: "Scary face—!?"

Her respectful introduction was interrupted by the overly candid words that slipped out of Subaru's mouth. Upon hearing this, the woman's expression congealed, and after her fiendish eyes blinked several times — Tears began to form.

Frederica: "...sniffle, sniffle..."

Subaru: "Wha...?"

Emilia: "Subaru, you dunce!!"

Without a word, the woman turned her face away, and even Subaru was shocked. Right after, he was assaulted by both an angry voice, and the painful sensation of having his ear pulled. "Ow, ow!", letting out a cry and turning to look, he saw Emilia with her usually gentle brows furrowed angrily.

Emilia: "That's a terrible thing to say to a girl! Frederica did so much to take care of you and you..."

Frederica: "I-I ask that you might let it go, Emilia-sama. It is quite alright. I was... I was the one in the wrong after all. I was so happy to have been called back to the mansion, I got too over-excited... and forgot that my looks are usually unpleasant for many..."

Pulling on the hem of Emilia's sleeve, she— the woman called Frederica was shaking her head. With her other hand she was covering her mouth.



Illustration from Volume 10, coloring by u/Y_Alrugaishi ([source](#))

Frederica: “I apologize for startling you so. More than that, I did something very inappropriate a short while ago. I never thought I would mistake Natsuki Subaru-sama for an intruder.”

Subaru: “Intruder... Ah, wait a minute. I think I understand what happened now.”

Released from Emilia’s chastisement for the moment, Subaru massaged his ear while taking in her words. In fact, he kind of realized the gist of what happened.

Basically, the mysterious figure he ran into right after entering the mansion was—

Subaru: “When I returned to the mansion, Frederica-san thought I was an intruder, and so tried to take me out. Then, Emilia-tan came in after me, and cleared up the misunderstanding, and that brings us to now... Right?”

Frederica: “That’s exactly right... You really can process things quickly I see.”

Subaru: “There are things I can’t read from just the situation though... No, before that.”

Frederica’s agreement confirming his thoughts, Subaru then turned his gaze to Emilia who was now standing behind Frederica, nudging her chin to point in Frederica’s direction. He was painfully aware of the meaning behind Emilia’s action. So Subaru stood up from the couch, and facing Frederica, said,

Subaru: “Nice to meet you, I am very sorry for saying something so uncalled for all of a sudden. I know I can’t make excuses like having just woken up, or that I was just joking around and expect to be forgiven. You can decide whether to boil or fry me... Though I would be really thankful if there wasn’t much pain involved.”

To say he was acting like a man, it was more like Subaru dipped his head while saying this somewhat limp apology.

They definitely started off on the wrong foot, but unlike her, who had only attacked a suspicious intruder, Subaru’s words were just completely rude. So, just as he said, if it would clear up her anger, Subaru would willingly accept any kind of punishment.

Preferably without physical pain, and his hopes were rather leaning towards emotional abuse instead... That much was the commitment of the man Subaru’s rather effeminate apology.

Frederica: “—Haha, you really are a funny guy.”

With those words, her smile hiding behind the hand covering her mouth, Frederica blew it all away. At the question mark floating above Subaru’s head, Frederica bowed, the translucent, golden hair flowing around her face.

Frederica: “I should really be the one apologizing. On Emilia-sama’s request, I have been testing you.”

Subaru: “Testing?”

At Frederica’s words, both Subaru and Emilia tilted their heads. They had no idea what she was talking about.

It’d be fine if Subaru was confused, but if he were to believe her words, then it would be strange to see Emilia showing the same air of confusion as well. Looking at their synchronous response, Frederica’s smile deepened.

Frederica: “Even though I may have been acting according to my sense of duty to protect the mansion, what I did to Subaru-sama was still rude. I was prepared, or rather left with no other choice, but to be relieved of my position after such an act.”

Subaru: “No, I think you jumped to that conclusion way too soon. I’m a guy who will understand if we talk things out, right?”

Frederica: “Then, Emilia-sama asserted herself ever so firmly. She really tried so hard, I thought for sure even my face would turn red from the flowery things she was saying about Subaru...”

Subaru: “Wha!?”

Shocked by what she had just said, Subaru let out a strangled cry, looking towards Emilia. While Emilia was standing there trying so hard to hide her own deep scarlet countenance.

Emilia: “Fre-de-ri-ca-!”

Hands on her hips, Emilia uncharacteristically let out a hysterical voice, glaring sharply at the maid. On the receiving end of all that, Frederica calmly retorted.

Frederica: “Oh my, so scary... I see Emilia-sama hasn’t changed, still not cute at all. Normally, whether what I said was true or not, turning red and getting flustered would have been the prettiest response.”

Emilia: “Eh, really...? Wait, I’m not going to get tricked today. Even someone like me, always getting tricked, would learn to know better! That’s right, I know when you’re lying, one of your eyes goes lazy!”

Frederica: “I had no idea that was the case. By the way Emilia-sama, did you know that whenever you lie, your ears get a little longer?”

Emilia: “No way!?”

Emilia’s expression of victory, an arm outstretched and a finger pointing towards Frederica, was interrupted when she darted her hands back to grab both her ears. Getting this response, at that point Frederica’s victory was complete.

Still flustered, Emilia seemed not to have realized she lost, but Subaru, who had been watching her intently, let out a sigh and shrugged his shoulders.

Subaru: “Seems like I’ve been completely defeated... My name is Natsuki Subaru and... Do I even need to do an introduction?”

Frederica: “Yes, of course. I would love to hear it. Let’s start over and get to know each other properly this time.”

With those words, Frederica removed the hand covering her mouth, revealing a smile lined with pointed fangs. This time, seeing her weaponized smile, all the wind left Subaru’s lungs.

Subaru: “Come to think of it, I think I heard of you... A maid who quit a little while ago before I arrived here, right? I came to the mansion about a month ago... So it’s been three months since you left?”

Frederica: “That seems to be right. I had resigned my position due to personal reasons, and I still remember how painfully lonely it felt, leaving here. But it seems that I was able to return much sooner than I expected.”

Covering her mouth with her sleeve, Frederica smiled. As long as she covers her mouth, her beautiful golden hair and her cold, barely passable gaze, would combine into something even resembling feminine beauty. But her mischievous personality and her mouth full of fangs tend to negate that no matter what.

In the living room of the Roswaal Mansion, Subaru and Frederica have just exchanged some basic information beyond their names. Listening to her self-introduction again, he seemed to recall having heard that name before.

Subaru: “Three months ago, so that means you’re acquainted with Emilia-tan, right?”

Emilia: “Hrmph! That would be correct, yes.”

Subaru: “Who says «Hrmph» these days? Also sulking like that is so outdated it’s cute, geez.”

To Subaru’s question and gaze, Emilia sat down onto the couch, averting her eyes as if refraining from joining the conversation, though she was obviously still listening intently. She had been acting like this ever since she realized, too late, how Frederica had tricked her. But that aside,

Subaru: “It’s only been two or three days since you returned, right? We left from the village three days ago... Four, if you count the traveling time. It seems to be quite a coincidence.”

Frederica: “I was surprised too when I returned to the mansion to find it empty. Luckily, there was a letter explaining things in the master’s study, so I avoided the worst of the confusion.”

Subaru: “A letter?”

Frederica: “Yes, from Ram. She was the one who called me back to the mansion, though she was rather haphazard in her communication... I know it’s indulging her too much to pass it off as her personality, but that’s how I feel.”

Through Frederica’s half-awkward smile, Subaru saw the time-worn bond she and Ram must have shared, and all the wonderful days they have passed together. At the same time, erased from her memories, her time spent with Rem must have been just as long.

Subaru: “Could you tell me why Ram called you back?”

Frederica: “I don’t completely understand the reason myself. But Emilia-sama was here at the time, I am sure she would know.”

At once, both their gazes poured onto Emilia inquisitively. Even now, Emilia continued to maintain her “I’m still really, really angry” attitude, turning her face away. But, as she slowly became unable to resist the attention focused on her, she tried to steal a quick glance in their direction. Only, it ended up being a rather obvious glance.

Subaru: “Emilia-tan, cheer up... Or, actually, I’m not the one who upset you this time. Frederica, apologize properly would you?”

Frederica: “I ask for your forgiveness, Emilia-sama. What I did a moment ago was not nice and I apologize. I was so happy we could meet again after so long, my bad side just, slipped out.”

Emilia: “...You won’t tease me like that anymore?”

Frederica: “No, I will refrain from doing so. For all the world, I will never again tease Emilia-sama in that manner again.”

Subaru couldn’t quite get rid of the feeling that the wording of Frederica’s apology left some room for interpretation. However, our Goddess Emilia seemed to believe in those words without a second thought, and her up-to-now sulking expression relaxed into one that seemed to say, “I suppose it can’t be helped”.

Emilia: “I understand. I’m not angry anymore. Is that good enough?”

Frederica: “Yes, I am very sorry for before, Emilia-sama. —Too easy.”

Somehow, only Subaru heard that last part. He jerked his head to look at Frederica, but she was playing dumb. Emilia, who had no idea she was being considered “too easy”, placed a finger to her cheek and said,

Emilia: “So, let’s see. The reason Frederica was called back to the mansion... Umm.”

Subaru: “Yeah, yeah. Rushing to call back someone you fired would mean there’s some kind of emergency... Actually, I think I might have an idea.”

There was indeed an emergency, it was only a few days ago that the Mansion and Arlam Village were targeted by the Witch Cult. Considering her skill, which had been able to knock Subaru unconscious in an instant, Frederica must be another shady maid of the Roswaal Mansion with some crazy combat abilities. In short, Ram must have called her back to buff the mansion's defenses during their state of—

Emilia: "It was because Ram's aptitude for housework is catastrophic, and the mansion ended up in an unimaginable state of disarray. It was only a few days, but it kept getting harder and harder to live in."

Subaru: "That's actually a very compelling reason!! She really is all talk and no... Wait, Ram knows she's hopeless, she even said so herself! She's right about that at least, but then she should have put in some effort to improve!! Right!?"

Subaru's chest felt like it would explode from how compelling that reality was compared to his over-guessing of the situation.

Emilia let out a wry smile at his outburst, and shifted her gaze to the living room— Or rather, to the entirety of the mansion, as though she could see through its very walls.

Emilia: "But, since Frederica returned, the mansion really has become quite tidy. I think Ram made the right decision in leaving it to someone capable, rather than make things worse by ignoring it."

Subaru: "Emilia-tan, I don't think you meant it, but that statement's like a slap to the face! And, well, I still don't think that's a good enough reason for her to give up so easily."

Frederica: "Putting Ram's assessment aside for the moment, it has been such a long time since I have been given the opportunity to do some really worthwhile work. Luckily, since no one was around, I was able to spend the time on further cleaning the mansion."

Listening to Frederica speak of diligently holding up this household, Subaru held his breath, unable to ignore the pain wrenching in his heart.

For this was the forces of the world compensating for the eradication of Rem's existence by the Authority of Gluttony.

Subaru: "I guess since Ram can't run the mansion by herself, the obvious solution was to rely on someone else..."

So Ram had contacted Frederica, who had resigned, asking her to return to the mansion. Without Rem, the Roswaal estate couldn't continue to function, and so, Rem's replacement, Frederica, had arrived.

Yet, the only one in the world who knows of this sad truth is Subaru. Ram had only done as necessity demanded, without stopping to think about why she needed Frederica's help all of a sudden, or just how she had managed to take care of the estate until then. That was all there was to it. But,

Subaru: "Sorry for being serious all of a sudden but... is it a requirement for all the maids of Roswaal's Mansion to be so quirky?"

Frederica: "...? Considering who our master is, what's the point of even asking that question?"

Subaru: "That's annoyingly persuasive!"

At this point, all of Subaru's doubts have been answered. Seeing his response, Frederica nodded her head contentedly, and resuming her perfect posture, stared fixedly at Subaru. Then, casually, in a lowered voice,

Frederica: "By the way, the driver of the dragon carriage outside the mansion has been left out there for over an hour now... Is that alright?"

Subaru: "Hmm? Oh, you mean Otto. I see, it's already been an hour... Well, I don't think it's that big of an issue. I want to hurry and let Patrasche rest in the stable, but you don't need to pay attention to that Otto guy too much..."

Otto: "Having shared a near-death experience together as companions, that is really quite heartless, Natsuki-san! I never thought I was lower in priority than a ground dragon!"

Right on cue, Otto dramatically opened the doors to the living room. His shoulders hunched up angrily, he was glaring at Subaru while disapprovingly breathing through his nostrils. At his entrance, Subaru slowly stood up, shook his head, and sighed.

Subaru: "No, Otto, you're mistaken."

Otto: "How am I mistaken? It's too late to take back your words from a moment ago..."

Subaru: “It’s not that you’re lower in priority than a ground dragon. It’s that you are much, much lower in priority than a ground dragon.”

Otto: “That’s twice over! That’s even worse!”

Content with Otto’s response and foot-stomping, Subaru turned his gaze toward the window. That is, toward the front yard where the dragon carriage pulled by Patrasche was parked.

Otto followed his gaze and seemed to understand its meaning. With a still somewhat bitter face, he spoke,

Otto: “I’ve already put Patrasche in the stables. She is a proud and difficult child, but she didn’t want to cause Natsuki-san any trouble, so she was quite docile.”

Subaru: “Hearing that from you, it makes me doubt your Divine Protection of the Soul of Language¹⁰. If she were a woman, Patrasche would have been a total *kuudere*¹¹, even though she’d be soft on the inside. When did this change happen?”

Otto: “How would I know that kind of thing. More importantly...”

As Subaru was still struggling to understand just what made Patrasche so devoted to him, Otto moved the conversation to the other matter regarding the dragon carriage, that is—

Otto: “What should be done about the girl sleeping in the carriage? I think it’s rather pitiful to leave her shut up in there. If you are busy, I could carry her to a room...”

Subaru: “—Don’t you lay a finger on Rem.”

There was not a hint of malice in Otto’s proposal. But his own voice was ice cold... Subaru himself was surprised by the razor sharpness of it, when he saw Otto flinch.

¹⁰ SummaryAnon has this as “Blessing of Xenoglossy”, while TranslationChicken has this as “Divine Protection of Anima Whispering”. I have opted for something that mixes up the Light Novel’s convention, Blessing of Language, with SummaryAnon’s, while keeping the more correct and literal “Divine Protection”. To quote Summary, “Xenoglossy is the biblical, miraculous ability to understand languages that one has had no prior learning or exposure to. “言霊” (*kotodama*) more accurately is the concept that words in themselves hold power, and can in themselves actualize results”, and therefore we arrive at “Soul of Language”.

¹¹ Character who is calm and collected on the outside, showing little emotion, but is caring and nice on the inside.

It was almost a whisper, the words were low and dark, a reflection of the viscous heaviness of his mind. It was good that this did not reach the ears of the girls, but still, Subaru was deeply disturbed by the abnormality of the sound that had escaped his throat.

Subaru: "...I'll bring her in, so you don't have to do anything. Your back would be screaming if you had to carry around a girl anyway."

Otto: "You know, merchants are always handling heavier goods during their work. We aren't as weak as you seem to think, Natsuki-san."

Subaru tried to cover up his last statement with a quip, and was thankful for Otto's conciliatory reply, which came after a moment of hesitation. He let out a sigh.

No matter what, his reaction was too extreme. Even though it wasn't intentional — Or rather, it was precisely because it was not intentional that it was a problem. His nerves had been on-end, and anyone who even tries to interfere with Rem, regardless of their intentions, seemed to him to be an enemy.

Subaru: "This is not a good pattern... Damn it, I feel so wretched. Why am I always so..."

He was supposed to have overcome this, yet here he was immediately stumbling over the first pebble he came across. Why does he never have the strength to stay standing tall?

If Rem was here, if Emilia was watching — If both of them were here now with him, surely, he would have that unwavering strength.

Subaru: "I brought it upon myself... No, I forced Rem to pay that price. What a deadbeat I am!"

There should have been a better, more perfect way.

He had believed that he did his uttermost, up to the end of the loop several days ago he deeply believed that. But there must have been an even better, seamless, perfect outcome somewhere. But Subaru had missed his chance to find it, in his complacency, in his cowardice, he compromised into an imperfect future. And Rem's sacrifice was the price.

If he had been more competent, he would have noticed it.

Before evacuating Emilia and Ram from the mansion, the handwritten letter he had given to Crusch's messenger had already turned blank. He had thought that a Witch Cultist accompanying the messenger had switched the letter in a ploy to sow confusion, but that is laughable.

There was no chance the Witch Cult could have been aware of their threat, and how could he have believed that the Witch Cult would use such a roundabout way to plant seeds of distrust between their two forces? More than that, if they went to all this trouble, compared to a blank letter would it not have been more effective to alter the contents?

Then why, why was the handwritten letter blank? If it was not the work of the Witch Cult, then there could only be one answer.

Subaru: "Rem wrote the letter. I was the one who asked it to be delivered, and Crusch was the one who gave it to the messenger, so the reality of it being handed over remained, and only the contents were erased."

That is the Authority of Gluttony, and the fate of those whose name and memories were eaten. An existence erased from the world, leaving only a complex web of incongruities behind. If you weren't aware of it, you'd never feel the unease, you'd never even realize anything had been missing.

If that was the case, for who, or for what, would have been the purpose of that existence—

Looking deeper into the fact that the letter was blank, properly investigating, fathoming, delving into the truth, perhaps he could have done it.

What Emilia had said then, come to think of it, the letter had arrived on the evening before the final day. At that moment, the contents of the letter were already gone, then Rem would have been attacked before that time. If so, then hardly any time had passed since Subaru and Rem had parted ways. The chances of being able to catch up were minuscule, but at least there was a chance.

Only, Subaru had let that chance slip by. Why it had slipped by, he could no longer tell. Had he really not felt anything was out of place?

Ram, with her sister-complex, Emilia, who was aware they had left Rem with him in the Capital, yet they had not mentioned Rem at all, so why—

Subaru: “—Ah.”

He finally realized it.

At that moment, Subaru let out an idiotic cry and brought his hand to his forehead. With wobbly movements he slid over to the wall, and smashed his head as hard as he could against it.

Shock and pain. But once wasn't enough, again, again, and again he repeated.

Emilia: “Wh, Subaru!?”

At his inexplicable action, the three with him were shocked into speechlessness. But Emilia was first to return to her senses, and called out to him bewilderedly. She gripped his shoulder from behind, turning him around,

Emilia: “What's wrong all of a sudden? It's not like this is the first time you've done something strange, but this is... Oh—, look your forehead has gotten all red!”

Subaru: “The extent of my stupidity, from the bottom of my heart I am amazed, really.”

Feeling the coolness of the tips of Emilia's fingers on his forehead, Subaru shook away his head in a trance of self-loathing. Like he said, he could not bear to look at this own foolishness.

Then, suddenly drawing close to Emilia, Subaru fixed his gaze into hers.

Subaru: “Emilia-tan, I have a favor to ask.”

Emilia: “Wh, wha—? Hold on, Subaru, your face is close, and your eyes are scaring me...”

Subaru: “My helpless idiocy... Could you please insult me a little?”

Emilia: “Huh?”

Startled, Emilia grew wide-eyed. Seeing rejection in her response, Subaru reached out to place both hands on her shoulders, holding her tightly preventing her from running away, and then brought his face in even closer.

Subaru: “Please. Don't forgive me, just insult me.”

Emilia: “Th, that, I can’t do that. I don’t think you’ve done wrong or anything...”

Subaru: “Just find a way!!!!”

Emilia: “Even if you ask me that...”

Subaru: “Please! If you do this for me, I’ll offer you my very soul...!”

Emilia: “Saying something this heavy is only making me more uncomfortable! Geez, I guess I really don’t have a choice.”

Emilia hesitated agonizingly against Subaru’s desperate, perverse plea, but finally she nodded in resignation. She cleared her throat and looked up at Subaru.

Emilia: “Subaru you blockhead!”

Subaru: “Uuu—”

Emilia: “You naughty, hyperactive, stubborn, selfish, rascal, don’t know when to give up, get way too cocky jerk!”

Subaru: “Gu... Gu... Gul...”

Emilia: “No one asked you, yet you only worry about other people, and don’t know your limit. You’re a softie who supports a hated half-elf. When I am rebuked and feeling depressed, you take my place, and behave rashly, get abused and do reckless things.”

Subaru: “Gu... —Eh?”

Emilia: “You listen but don’t respond properly, a coward who flirts and then runs away. A fool who comes to help someone in trouble, even after they had a huge fight. When things just aren’t working out, when you want something, you say the right thing, it’s so unfair. Then, when it’s all over, and everyone is running around taking care of the loose ends, you go to sleep by yourself and slack off. Subaru, you dullard!”

Subaru: “Dullard, now there’s a word you don’t hear much anymore...You know, Emilia-tan.”

He had been expecting a rebuke, but the abuse he received was far from it. The words didn't scratch at his heart and leave ugly scars, instead they were deep and kind, and left their mark on his and Emilia's hearts alike. At Subaru's call, Emilia kept her gaze pointed up at him, pursing her lips.

Emilia: "What?"

Subaru: "How do I say this... is that how you feel about me?"

Emilia: "I know, it's like all my feelings just flew out. Then I sort of went with it and after a while I had no idea what I was saying... Subaru, do you think that is how I really feel?"

Subaru: "I wonder. When you get caught up in the moment, are they your true feelings... I don't know if I could tell."

At the very least, Subaru had experience regretting things he said in the heat of the moment. Were those long pent up feelings wanting to finally escape her heart, or just the thoughtless emotions of a moment blurted out all of a sudden?

He thought no one could ever answer that question.

Subaru: "Thank you, Emilia-tan."

Emilia: "All I did was say bad things about you. To get thanked for that... Subaru, you really are abnormal, aren't you?"

Subaru: "Abnormal, but for Emilia-tan alone. If I hear it from you, then no matter if it's insult, abuse or a traffic safety poem, it will stir up my pleasure senses."

Emilia: "The last one I didn't understand, but it seems like something I really don't need to know so I'll forget I heard it. —So, are you satisfied now?"

She tried to respond while suppressing a giggle, but in the very end, her eyes looked tinged with sorrow. It was unfair, the raw expression she showed him sometimes, and it was why he couldn't leave her be.

In answer to her gesture, Subaru smiled a broad smile that showed his teeth.

Subaru: “Yeah, I’m fine now. Actually, maybe I’m still not okay. But, if I were to get a kiss from Emilia-tan to break my curse, I should be able to find the courage I need, if only...”

Emilia: “That’s too bad, because the request office has closed for the day.”

Subaru: “Damnit! I screwed up! Why am I always... too late... Ah!”

As if full of regret, Subaru fell to pieces. Seeing this, Emilia let out a wry smile. After spending some time looking wretched, Subaru finally stood up and looked around the room.

Subaru: “That said, I’m afraid there is some business I need to take care of. I feel bad for leaving everyone and Emilia-tan, but I need a little time. I don’t think it will take too long but... What’s with your face, Otto?”

Otto: “I feel like charging you for reparations after witnessing that ticklish scene, but I’ll leave the negotiations on pricing for later... What were you doing!?”

Otto, forgotten until now, voiced his discontent, to which Subaru crossed his arms and cocked his head in contemplation. Come to think of it, Otto doesn’t know about the last person in this mansion he has yet to become acquainted with.

If that’s the case, to tell Otto where he was planning on going next, just what words would be proper.

After agonizing over the problem for just a bit, Subaru unfolded his arms and said,

Subaru: “Well, I’m going to go meet a loli with drill curls holed up in a room that smells like mold.”

With that, he completely abandoned any responsibility to explain the situation, and left Otto to his state of confusion.

Arc 4 Special Intermission - The Girl in the Forbidden Library

Has been cut from the Light Novel Adaptation, would be found in Volume 8

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken (excerpt) — [Complete](#)

In another loop, lost to the memories of all except Natsuki Subaru.

Petelgeuse had been knocked unconscious and was captured alive to prevent him from possessing another body. The Gospel taken from Petelgeuse is tucked away in Subaru's jacket.

Undisguised, Subaru came to the Mansion to evacuate Emilia and Ram. Having succeeded, only Beatrice was still in the Forbidden Library, and Subaru stayed behind to find her...

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Subaru: "Wha—? This is odd!?"

Even though Subaru had heroically volunteered to find Beatrice and set out full of bravado... It's not going so well.

Usually, when Subaru wants to call Beatrice to come to dinner, all he must do is to open the first door he comes across, and he'd find Beatrice and the Forbidden Library on the other side. One time, he even found her just by opening the door to the dining room.

Beatrice's magic, Door Crossing is a spatial-transition Yin element magic of a level far beyond Subaru's comprehension.

A little girl, and an expert user of Yin magic, Beatrice uses the doors of the mansion to randomly obscure the Forbidden Library's entrance. Basically, there is only one right choice, and as if to toy with anyone who seeks to find it, the right choice would continually change without warning.

Somehow, Subaru easily breaks this with what he casually calls his Door Breaking ability, and it's unclear exactly why the one person who can always find the door in the first attempt just also happens to be someone who utterly can't read the mood.

Subaru: "To suddenly stop working at a time like this, it's a whole new level of disappointment, geez... After bragging like that to Emilia and Ram, if I still can't find you— I don't think I can just play cute and charm my way out of it, so please come out, oy..."

He muttered while opening all the doors in the servant's quarter one-by-one, having already opened all the doors in the central building where he first started, he's wasted quite a lot of time. This is the first time he's had so much difficulty finding Beatrice, and even if he tries to make light of the situation, it still won't stop the sweat from forming on his brows.

No matter what, in an empty mansion opening every single door one after the other only to be disappointed again and again, all this must look pretty pitiful to a bystander.

Subaru: "Damnit, I can't find it! This is bad, I'm running out of time! Should I give up and run off leaving things like this!? My conscience hurts just at the thought of the way Emilia-tan was looking at me with all that faith in her eyes... But maybe I don't have a choice?! I'll just have to tell everyone Beatrice has a serious stomachache and couldn't leave the bathroom—"

???: "—You can't think of any better excuses I suppose, you jerk!?"

As Subaru tore at his head, bemoaning his situation, he was met by the abrupt retort the moment he opened the door.

Before his eyes, the room that was supposed to be the bathroom was instead piled with the kind of paper used for something other than wiping one's butt — In short, it was replaced by a library stuffed full of books. The Forbidden Library, a sight he had grown so used to seeing, yet one he hadn't seen for a long time. Its guardian, a little girl wearing an extravagant dress, sat in front of him as always.

Entering the room, there was a wooden stepladder straight in front of him, and seated on top of it was a girl with a thick book open in her lap.

Subaru: “Beako, found you in the bathroom safe and sound— My instincts aren’t half bad if I don’t say so myself.”

Beatrice: “It’s only that I took pity on you, since you won’t give up I suppose. And for the sake of Betty’s good name, it would be troublesome if you started telling people something strange.”

Subaru: “Don’t worry about it! Everyone poops, and in an emergency with an upset stomach, not many people would want to respond when they’re called. But I shouldn’t be saying something so insensitive when you’re here straining yourself, sorry!”

Beatrice: “What you just said is already the most insensitive thing in the world I suppose!”

Standing up from her stool, Beatrice was huffing with outright indignation. Watching her curls thrashing about wildly, Subaru tried to calm her by saying “My bad, my bad”, and waving his hands lightly.

Subaru: “Putting that aside, it’s been a while. I was looking all over the mansion for you, it’s like you wouldn’t open up to me at all.”

Beatrice: “...That is how the Door Crossing is supposed to work when I’m paying attention. Even you, if I really tried, you would not be able to enter I suppose.”

Subaru: “The fact that you let me in here makes that hard to believe! *Tsundere*¹²!”

Beatrice: “If I didn’t let you in, you’d have gone around threatening me with that scandal!”

After shouting angrily, Beatrice seemed embarrassed by her outburst and wore an awkward expression on her face. Seeing her change in attitude, the corner of Subaru’s mouth relaxed a little as he walked up to where she was sitting.

¹² Character with a personality who is initially polarized, displaying cold, temperature and even hostile sides, before gradually showing a warmer, friendlier side over time.

Subaru: “That aside, I’m glad I was able to find you. I’m sorry this is so sudden, but could you get ready to leave? It’ll be problematic if you stayed here.”

Beatrice: “—Betty won’t be leaving.”

Subaru: “Hah?”

At those abrupt words rejecting his suggestion, Subaru stopped in his steps.

He looked at her, and, looking back at him, she sighed at his dumbfounded expression.

Beatrice: “«Betty won’t be leaving», that’s what I said. I have no intention of leaving the Forbidden Library, or the mansion for that matter I suppose. It would be best if you accept that, and just leave.”

Subaru: “Wait a second, you just don’t understand the situation right now. You can’t stay here, it’s too dangerous, so let’s go together. I’ll tell you everything!”

Beatrice: “Even without you explaining it, I already understand the gist of it I suppose. Also, stop treating me like a child.”

Glaring at Subaru, Beatrice reached out towards one of the bookshelves, taking down a book too large for her hands that looked like an illustrated encyclopedia. She returned to her step ladder hugging the book to her chest as she always did, then, she sat down with the book open in her lap as though nothing had changed, as though she really had no intention of leaving.

Subaru: “Oy, come on, don’t end the conversation like that, shutting me out all of a sudden.”

Beatrice: “There’s nothing left for Betty to say I suppose. You are just one-sidedly wanting to continue, and even if you do, my answer won’t change. Like me, you have no time to waste either I suppose?”

Subaru: “Guu... If you know that much, then help me out. I’m taking you with me. You’re coming with me. Okay?”

Beatrice: “No thanks. It’s the same no matter who comes. —Yes, no matter who it is, I won’t let them set one foot inside the Forbidden Library I suppose.”

Her eyes dropping down to her book, Beatrice's quiet reply was strong and firm. Scratching his head at her stubbornness, Subaru let out a sigh,

Subaru: "Look, I didn't come here this time just to make a fuss, or because Ram has dinner ready. I don't want to say it, but the Witch Cult is coming. They don't discriminate in who they attack, and if I leave you here in the mansion..."

Beatrice: "You should be well acquainted with the power of my Door Crossing ability. And even if anyone dares set foot in here...I won't show them any mercy I suppose."

Subaru: "—!"

For a moment, Subaru felt the dangerous presence pouring out of Beatrice as she said those words. An icy shiver ran up his back. Sucking in a sharp breath, he realized these were the aftershocks of the waves of magic radiating from her entire body. The enormity of the Mana flow was such that even Subaru, who has very little experience with magic, could tell how overwhelming it was.

Subaru: "—! Even so, I am taking you with me."

Beatrice: "That again..."

Subaru: "Whether you are strong or not, it has nothing to do with that! You're a girl, you're little, that's reason enough! I don't want to leave you here where it's dangerous, do I need any other reason?!"

Even being pressured by the might of her aura, Subaru planted his feet firmly on the floor, shouting.

Seeing the man in front of her arguing even more vehemently, Beatrice's eyes opened wide with astonishment. Then, as though enduring something painful, she closed them again.

Subaru furrowed his brows at her response, but still pushed forward intent on taking her with him. Just then,

Beatrice: "Betty, can't go with you. Please, don't confuse things anymore."

Subaru: "I'm not mistaken. You are. —That's all I have to say."

Beatrice: "You're stubborn I suppose. —You know, I hate stubbornness."

Beatrice murmured something in a whisper. Uncertain what she said, Subaru was about to ask, but before he could, Beatrice stood up from her stool.

Beatrice: “I see, I suppose, you win. I’ll do as you asked, I suppose.”

Subaru: “Oh? O-oh, that’s good. You understood, that good. For a moment, after you stood up, I was getting ready to get blown out of here flying you know.”

Beatrice: “For Betty, blasting you away so only your shadow remains in this world would be too easy... But I won’t do something so cruel as that.”

Saying something so frightening as though it were nothing, Beatrice returned the book she had taken back into its shelf. Curious at her movements, Subaru realized something and raised his brows. Perhaps it was because she had agreed to go with him that he let his guard down. On a whim, he asked,

Subaru: “By the way, there are tons of books in here, but are you familiar with any languages other than the I-Ro-Ha scripts¹³?”

Beatrice: “I was wondering what you would ask all of a sudden... By I-Ro-Ha you mean the alphabets like I and the others I suppose? Using an expression like that, it is bound to anger the professional linguists.”

Subaru: “Yeah yeah, my bad my bad, sorry. But, getting down to business...”

Giving Beatrice, who was glaring sharply at him, a nervous smile, Subaru pulled a single book out of his jacket. The book was bound all in black, and its contents—

Subaru: “Well it’s this thing, but all the letters inside are nothing I’ve ever seen before. I was wondering if you might know...”

Beatrice: “—I should like to know, why you are holding that right now I suppose.”

Suddenly, her rigid voice overpowered Subaru’s words, cutting him off. Looking at her, Beatrice’s eyes were stretched wide, staring fixedly at the Gospel in his hands.

¹³ The ReZero world language can be written using 3 different scripts, I-script, Ro-script and Ha-script. Think of it the same way as Japanese has Hiragana, Katakana and Kanji.

Subaru was surprised by the intensity of her reaction, having only brought up the subject casually.

Beatrice: "I would like to know why you are holding that right now I suppose. Answer me."

Subaru: "Even if this is trash... I took it from that idiot from the Witch Cult. He was treating it with some crazy religious zeal, so I thought it might have some clues written in it."

Beatrice: "Took it? From the Witch Cult? You, of all people..."

Putting a hand to her forehead, slightly swaying back and forth, Beatrice's expression changed. The blood drained from her already pale complexion, Subaru was disconcerted by the way her eyes swam, unfocused.

She seemed as if about to fall over at any moment, so without thinking, Subaru reached out a hand to steady her.

Subaru: "Oy, oy oy, are you okay? If you aren't feeling well, don't push yourself."

Beatrice: "Betty is... It's no good, if that's how things are. But, leaving it in his care... It's unthinkable, but maybe Roswaal has been, until now...?"

Subaru: "Hel—lo—? Sorry to interrupt you when you are looking so serious, but can—you—hear—me—?"

Beatrice: "I am only thinking right now I suppose, so you can just wait for a moment."

Beatrice silenced the worried Subaru with a sharp look, and he calmed down quietly. He closed his mouth as he watched Beatrice shut her eyes, changing her expression.

After some time had passed, and she seemed to remain unresponsive, Subaru opened the Gospel in his hands for the first time in a while, flipping through the pages he still couldn't understand.

Then, he suddenly noticed it.

Subaru: "This book, the latter half is all blank... But, was this page here before?"

It was written in an unknown alphabet, and the second half was missing pages that seemed to have been ripped out. These two facts hadn't changed. Only, the last page to have writing on it seemed to have had words added to it.

Though he couldn't read it anyway. Perhaps he was just imagining it, there was no reason to worry about it that much.

Beatrice: "—That book, what do you plan to do with it I suppose?"

Beatrice, who had been silent for a long time, asked all of a sudden.

Resting her hand against her lips, as if reaching some conclusion to her own mind, Beatrice threw this question at Subaru. "Even if you ask me..." Subaru responded, affected by her demeanor,

Subaru: "Decipher the contents... Though I'm not interested in the teachings of the Witch Cult or anything, it's just in case there is any kind of useful information here. Otherwise, I wouldn't want to be carrying around a book that creepy guy cared so much for."

Beatrice: "...At the very least, Betty can't read what's in there. However, if you don't want to hold on to it, you could entrust its care to me I suppose."

Subaru: "Entrust it?"

Beatrice: "It is a strange book that was once cherished by a strange owner I suppose. If you have any reservations about carrying around a book like that, I could take it off your hands for you."

Beatrice reached out timidly towards him.

From that gesture, he could tell, at the very least, that this wasn't a book she longed to have. These were not the words someone would use if they were planning on reselling it for a tidy profit.

They were words filled with good intentions. That, and from the way she had been acting, she obviously understood the book was undoubtedly a Gospel. Thus,

Subaru: "Sorry, but I have to reject your offer."

Subaru said, gently pushing Beatrice's extended hand down.

At his words, Beatrice's eyes flickered for only a moment, before her lovely face turned into something stern and heavy.

Beatrice: "Why, I suppose. You instinctively know what an evil thing that is, don't you? At the very least, you realize that it's not something good to be fascinated with I suppose. In that case, rather than hold it yourself, Betty..."

Subaru: "I'm like an evil imp that doesn't want to give something away even if someone wants it so badly, and even if I've no use for it... I guess that's my stance. Really, that's it."

This book, called a Gospel, seemed to hold a high significance for the disciples of the Witch Cult. Even more, its owner was Petelgeuse, a very high-ranking member of the Witch Cult. Memories of how attached that man was to this book were still fresh in his mind. Even though he had already been captured and debilitated, Subaru was still wary.

Subaru: "It's a book some scary old man might come drooling over to get back. There's no excuse for a guy to give something like that to a little girl just because it's creepy to hold onto."

Beatrice: "—!"

Subaru: "If it's dangerous then I'll hang onto it. After all, I'm here to get you to someplace safe you know? Putting you in danger on purpose would be flipping that on its head. Don't treat me like I'm a cold-hearted guy, come on."

Lightly smiling, Subaru placed the book back into his clothes, hiding it from Beatrice's view. He had no idea what was going through her mind as she saw that.

She blinked just once, her lips parting as if to speak.

Beatrice: "——"

But unable to say anything, her mouth closed again, and she turned her face away.

There was something unnatural in her response, but her expression prevented him from asking about it. Instead, he cracked his neck, and proceeded to change the topic.

Subaru: “Ah, well it’s no big deal. For now, since we decided to move, I’ll leave the preparations to you. Don’t bring anything too big, but two or three important books shouldn’t be a problem. Maybe two or three sets of clothes as well...”

Beatrice: “...The library will follow Betty wherever I go. More importantly, you have convinced the other two already I suppose?”

Subaru: “I just heard something really convenient! Yeah, I convinced them alright. You’re the only one left. We’re all going to evacuate to the Sanctuary, where Roswaal is.”

Beatrice: “Roswaal, I suppose... What happened to the maid’s younger sister that went with you?”

Unexpectedly, Beatrice changed the topic to Rem.

Hearing her suddenly talk about Rem was surprising, and Subaru couldn’t help lifting his brows, looking slightly astonished. Realizing this probably wasn’t the best response, he tried to relax his expression, saying,

Subaru: “If you’re talking about Rem, she’s taking care of things in the capital at the moment. We caught this giant fish on the way here, kind of. It was so big, that she had to go back to prepare a really luxurious feast. Once this is all settled, let’s all go over there and stuff ourselves.”

Beatrice: “You look really happy when you talk about her you know. —Did anything happen?”

Subaru: “Erm.”

Hearing Rem’s name, Subaru overreacted a little. He couldn’t deny that he was talking faster than usual. Beatrice’s remark had hit the nail on the head, and Subaru turned his gaze away, whistling nonchalantly.

Subaru: “No, n-nothing happened really.”

Beatrice: “Being attended to so tenderly, it would be stranger if no feelings emerged, I suppose. Betty won’t say anything about it, so you can do as you like.”

Subaru: “I-I’m not trying to hide anything you know? Only, it’s gonna take a lot of courage to face Emilia-tan and her sister about this so soon... So I guess I’m in kind of a tactical retreat.”

Fumbling for words, Subaru pressed his index fingers together and, embarrassed, turned his back to Beatrice with his head sunk down.

It was what it was, and there was truth in Subaru needing courage to bring it up. Surely Emilia wouldn't want to hear him say, "I will have both you and Rem!" all of a sudden. It would be like pouring water in her ears. Though this was his overall plan in the end.

Subaru: "It's a good thing to raise the goal to work towards. That way motivation and effort comes more easily. I don't dislike hard work, you know. Only I haven't really had a plan for the future until now—!"

His excuses puffing him up higher and higher, carried away by his emotions, he was suddenly stopped by an unexpected sensation.

He felt a warmth against his back, followed by arms wrapping around his waist, holding him tightly. They were small, thin arms, and he knew immediately whose they were.

Beatrice.

Subaru: "Oh, it's only Beako. Startled me there. Don't surprise me like that all of a sudden, come on..."

Beatrice: "That response really irritates me I suppose. —But, it's enough."

Subaru: "Huh?"

Just as he tilted his head at her unexpected words, a sudden bright light blinded him.

Before he realized it, the door opened all on its own,

Beatrice: "Farewell—"

Subaru: "Huh, wh—!?"

The arms that had been holding him let go, and he was pushed forward by an immense pressure from behind. Unable to resist, he began falling forward, sliding towards the door. This way, as if being sucked through, he flew toward the door—

Subaru: "Beatrice—!"

Beatrice: “Betty... can’t go with you.”

Twisting himself around, Subaru looked back into the room just before he was swept through the door. The form of the girl caught in his field of view, had large droplets of tears emerging in her eyes.

Subaru: “———!”

Unable to form any words, his vision twisted. Caught in the shifting spatial dimensions, his body moved down a path that shouldn’t exist as the link to the Forbidden Library began to fade.

Just like that, Subaru’s body was flung from the space of the Forbidden Library, disappearing some place far away.

Beatrice: “—ther.”

Watching this unfold, Beatrice shut the door that had been left open.

There was a sound of space ripping apart, followed by the deep silence that descended once again upon the Forbidden Library.

Beatrice: “—Mother.”

In a small voice, as though about to cry, Beatrice called to that name. The large droplets of tears had already disappeared from her eyes, though her expression remained.

Beatrice: “Just... how much more... must Betty...”

About to break down crying, Beatrice walked back to her stepladder, laying down all her weight onto it. She reached out her arm behind the ladder— from a shelf that was usually behind her, she took down a book, and hugged it close.

Beatrice: “Mother... Mother... Mother...!”

Like a child, lost, clinging tightly to the book pressed against her chest, Beatrice’s quiet cries resounded through the Forbidden Library.

The book in her embrace, bound all in black, never responded.

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When later, Subaru died, ambushed by the Witch Cult, all this was lost.

Except, like so many things, only he still remembers it.

Arc 4 Chapter 3 - Reunion and Passing

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 10, Chapter 1 “At the Place of Return”, Part 5

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

—Slowly, focusing only on turning the doorknob in his hand, Subaru held his breath.

He had a feeling this was the one.

Quietly wandering through the mansion like this, he’d suddenly notice a door that particularly draws his attention.

Leaving Emilia and the others behind in the living room, having been granted a little bit of time, Subaru wandered through the mansion alone, and found it just as he set foot into the hallway on the second floor.

The moment he touched the doorknob, his suspicion turned into conviction, and as he started to push it open, there was not a single doubt in his mind.

And, taking in the existence of that room, in that place, at that very moment, he stepped inside,

Subaru: “Hey, it’s been a while.”

The Forbidden Library, just as he remembered it, stretched out in front of his eyes.

The little girl, who is the master of that dimly lit room, hadn’t changed a bit either— Sitting on a stepladder like it’s a makeshift chair, she was in the middle of leafing through a book.

Beatrice: “—The mansion was noisy today, I figured you returned I suppose.”

Her eyes lifted for a moment to take Subaru into her gaze. —However, after muttering as if she was bored, she immediately lost interest, and dropped her eyes back into her book.

Beatrice: “If you’re back, that means Nii-cha¹⁴ must be back as well. I sense that girl, and a few other annoying insects as well I suppose.”

Subaru: “Puck hasn’t shown up yet, he’s recharging his batteries, I think. Ah, I don’t like how you talk about Emilia-tan like she’s in the same category you know! Though I don’t mind the part about Otto.”

Beatrice: “You’re really noisy.”

Beatrice huffed her nose at Subaru’s small talk, and rearranged her legs under her extravagant dress. Seeing that, Subaru continued to walk closer, stringing words together as he did so.

Subaru: “But it sure has been a long time since I saw you. Since that time with Pete... Ah, wait, that didn’t happen... The last time was before I left for the Capital wasn’t it? It’s about ten days now...”

Beatrice: “Not long at all I suppose. While Betty is in this room, the flow of time outside really doesn’t matter that much.”

Subaru: “And there you are saying strange things again, geez. Also, when you’re talking with someone, you really shouldn’t have your nose buried in a book you know! Seeing me again after ten days, I’d understand if you’re so happy that you want to hide your blush but still...”

Beatrice: “I can make your mouth spit blood instead of noise until you turn pale in the face, you know.”

At the girl’s unhidden annoyance, Subaru loosened the tension in his face.

Whenever he comes to talk with the girl guarding the Forbidden Library, Subaru couldn’t help but want to do things to poke at her stubborn attitude and mess up that deadpan expression of hers. Cracking jokes and clowning around, annoying her until she gets really pissed off, then keep prodding her until she finally couldn’t stand it anymore and throws him out.

There is a part of himself that thoroughly enjoys these exchanges. But just why does he always have this feeling towards her, he isn’t quite sure if he knows.

¹⁴ “Nii-cha” (にいちゃ) is a cute way of saying “nii-chan” (にいちゃん), meaning brother. Beatrice uses this to refer to Puck.

Beatrice: “I take the fact that you’ve returned as a sign that the recent disturbances around here have settled, I suppose.”

Subaru: “You noticed... Well that’s only natural, I guess. Emilia and Ram ran around all over the mansion looking for you, you know? It would be nice to apologize to them later.”

Beatrice: “Betty? Apologize? To whom, and for what, I can’t imagine why I should do such a thing.”

Huffing with her perfectly formed nose, Beatrice closed her book with a loud clap, and rose from her seat on the stepladder. Then, putting the thickly bound book back onto its shelf, on tip-toes, she stretched as hard as she could to reach for the one right next to it.

Seeing she was having trouble getting it out, Subaru walked up beside her.

Subaru: “This one? Here.”

Beatrice: “...No, it’s the one next to it I suppose. If you’re trying to give help that people haven’t asked for, at least try to help them correctly.”

Subaru: “Such a thankful loli... Oy, careful not to drop it. You will get hurt if this brick falls on your toes.”

As Subaru was pulling out the book with one hand, he found it surprisingly heavy. Once he had carefully handed it over to her, Beatrice accepted it, hugging it to her chest. Subaru briefly tried to read the title, but as someone who could barely understand anything beyond the I alphabet, it was too far beyond Subaru’s ability to comprehend.

Beatrice: “I don’t think I will thank you I suppose.”

Subaru: “I know you’re trying to follow the *tsundere* path and all, but frankly, you saying that and you just straight up saying «Thank you» pretty much carry the same meaning at this point.”

At least, the fact that she’d acknowledge that his actions would be generally considered worthy of thanks, was in itself a testament to her good will.

In response to Subaru’s retort, Beatrice frowned and turned her face to the side. Seeing her obstinate attitude, Subaru scratched his head,

Subaru: “I don’t mind if you never thank me until the end of time, but make sure to at least thank those two, ok? They were really worried, leaving you behind in the mansion.”

Beatrice: “It’s not like I ever asked them to...”

Subaru: “Don’t say something lame like that. Most people never asked to be born but are born anyway, and even if you don’t want people to worry about you, they will still worry... And that second part is only true when you have kind-hearted people around you.”

There was no need to specify that Emilia and Ram were that kind of people. Emilia’s everyday way of life pretty much gives her a good-person score of 100 out of 100, although Ram’s score would probably go into negative numbers, how she is on the inside is a different matter.

Regardless, Beatrice didn’t show any sign of agreeing with him. Instead, turning away, she bit her lip slightly and said,

Beatrice: “But in the end, they still left the mansion I suppose... without Betty.”

Subaru: “What do you mean? Are you trying to say you didn’t want to be left behind? You cut yourself off with that *hikikomori*¹⁵ Door spell, far away, would it have been too troublesome to come out yourself?”

Beatrice: “It’s Door Crossing. Don’t change it to a ridiculous name like that I suppose. Besides, such a suggestion is insulting to Betty.”

Without acknowledging Subaru’s words, Beatrice continued facing to the side, her obstinate attitude unbroken. He sensed this time there was something different, and dangerous, beyond her usual act. Subaru furrowed his brows and didn’t know what to do.

With her acting like this even before they’d started talking about what he had actually come here to ask her, he wondered how he could bring it up now. Even so, perhaps he still had one more trick up his sleeve to lift up her mood...

¹⁵ Meaning NEET, aka shut-ins that never leave their room.

Subaru: “Oh well. If you’re going to be that stubborn, I’ll just tell Emilia-tan that you wouldn’t stop repeating «thank you» with tears of gratitude streaming from your eyes.”

Beatrice: “You shouldn’t make up lies?! It’s been a very long time since I last shed a tear I suppose.”

Subaru: “What, you’re saying you’re too embarrassed to cry? If you say that kind of thing while you’re still a kid, you’re gonna find it hard to express your emotions when you grow up, you know? Kids shouldn’t worry about what other people think and just cry when they’re sad.”

Beatrice: “I have some reservations listening to this coming from a man who cried his heart out on the lap of the woman he likes.”

Subaru: “Can’t you please forget about that!?”

Perhaps Emilia herself knew not to remind Subaru of this embarrassing history.

He was acting like an idiot to distract himself from the dread he carried deep inside his heart, unconsciously building up an increasingly unsustainable dam. Lying on Emilia’s lap, all this collapsed, and all the emotions he had been bottling up ever since first being summoned to this world came rushing out in a flood of tears. Reminded of that time again, his face felt like it was about to burst into flame. Although, along with that heat, deep within his heart he also felt a radiant light shining from that memory.

Scratching at his cheek, while trying to redo the seal on that particular memory, Subaru snuck a quick glance at Beatrice. Looking bored as always, she had sat back down on the stepladder with the book Subaru had retrieved for her. She had just slowly started letting her eyes run over its contents.

She was clearly trying to shut off any further conversation, but if he were to let her do that, there would be no meaning in him coming here in the first place.

Subaru: “Anyway, putting crying or not aside... I have something I want to ask you, is that ok?”

Beatrice: “You’re free to ask I suppose.”

Within her reply, accompanied by the sound of a page turning over in her book, there was the unspoken message “whether I answer or not is another story”. There was no indication of cooperation from her,

but at least she gave him permission to ask. Subaru quietly mumbled “Alright then” under his breath and, intending to breach the subject of his visit—

Subaru: “—Come to think of it, considering all that commotion was going on outside, wasn’t your reaction kind of lacking?”

However, what came out of his mouth didn’t carry the meaning he had intended, and instead only served to reignite the conversation he had just tried to close off.

Hearing Subaru’s words, Beatrice raised her eyes from her book. Sensing his reflection within her clear, immaculate gaze, Subaru sucked in a small breath,

Subaru: “Wh... while you were sitting in here acting like nothing was happening, it was getting pretty crazy outside you know? This strange group of guys had the mansion surrounded, and...”

Beatrice: “Stop it.”

Subaru: “If I hadn’t somehow managed to bring back reinforcements with me from the Capital, you have no idea what would have happened. And, it’s not like it was easy for me to make my way back here...”

Beatrice: “I really want you to stop now I suppose.”

Subaru: “It was actually a journey so rough, if I were to tell it to you, both you and I would be in tears by the end but having finally cleared that hurdle...!”

With a loud, cracking noise, Subaru’s rant was forcibly cut off.

Looking around, the source of the sound was the book Beatrice had been holding in her hands which she had slammed shut with all her strength. Subaru tried to understand Beatrice’s expression, and her intentions, but she turned to face him with a sharp and merciless glare, and said,

Beatrice: “How about you say what you actually came here to say, you spineless coward.”

Subaru: “...Yeah.”

He couldn’t deny it.

She was right, and had clearly seen through his attempt to run away. To run away from the answer to the question he knew he had to ask.

Subaru: “Do you...”

Gulping down his breath, he squeezed shut his eyes, listening to the beating of his heart.

Beyond his closed eyelids, he saw her sweet smile, smiling back at him.

Subaru: “Do you... remember Rem?”

—His question became sound and, having exploded into reality, could no longer be taken back.

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In the loops after the slaying of the White Whale, Subaru had only spoken to Beatrice once in the Forbidden Library. The purpose of that conversation was to convince her to escape from the Witch Cult, but she refused, and in the end, the girl was left in the mansion all alone. While he could no longer remember everything they had discussed, looking back, there was one fact that he could not miss.

Beatrice, at that point in time, had asked him about Rem, who was supposed to have returned with him.

By that time, the handwritten letter had already turned blank when it reached the Mansion. In other words, the conversation took place after Rem had been attacked by the Sin Archbishops, and Beatrice, who had never seemed to care much about Rem up to that point, had suddenly asked about her—

Subaru: “Answer me. Do you remember Rem who used to live in this mansion?”

He wanted her to remember, she must remember, thinking this, Subaru’s voice distorted toward the end.

The depths of his memories confirmed this, and his ever-weakening heart, so close to sinking, to drowning, yearning to be revived, would not deny this...

Beatrice silently stared at Subaru.

Within her pupils, there was neither feeling nor emotion. What she was thinking was impossible to read.

Normally, she was a girl whose emotions are easy to understand, but at this moment, Subaru could not pick up anything at all. His teeth itched, it was as if time stood still, and Subaru's heart was burning down to ashes.

Subaru: "Hey..."

Why don't you say anything.

You either remember, or you don't, it's not a difficult question to answer...

...Of course, there was only one answer he wanted to hear. That Beatrice remembers Rem, and that she would laugh at the sheer stupidity of his question.

Memories eaten, name swallowed, removed from the world, what a stupid notion that is.

Let her feel as he feels, let her feel that same indignation at the cruel outrageousness of this world. Or, even if they could just share the common reality of her existence, perhaps they would find the solution together, and that would be enough.

So, tell me you know her.

Like Emilia, like Crusch, like Wilhelm, like all the others, Rem— don't tell me you have forgotten her.

Wanting to hear her answer. Dreading to hear her answer. Agitation, contradiction, his emotions wrenched and twisted.

Then, to Subaru's faltering, convulsing heart, Beatrice spoke—

Beatrice: "—I don't want to answer."

She turned her gaze away from Subaru, answering neither yes nor no.

Losing his breath with a "Ha", for an instant, Subaru's mind stopped. Then bewilderedly flinging his arms in the air—

Subaru: “Wa, wait. What do you mean you don’t want to answer? Doesn’t that question only have the answers *hai ka iie*¹⁶?”

Beatrice: “I don’t know what you mean by «*hai ka iie*» I suppose. And my answer will never change. I don’t want to answer.”

Subaru: “I’m saying that isn’t an answer!!!!”

Swinging his arms down, Subaru stepped forward furiously.

The girl sitting on the stepladder did not even glance at his intense gesture, and only firmly closed her lips. Seeing her obstinate attitude, flames engulfed his chest, impossible to stop.

Subaru: “Those are not the words I want to hear from you!”

Beatrice: “Why does Betty have to answer in words you want to hear I suppose? ...Stop making a fuss. The Library will get disordered, I suppose.”

Subaru: “You...!”

Subaru stormed toward Beatrice.

The face that did not even want to look at him, Subaru wanted to force it around and ask her face to face how could she say something so heartless. But,

Subaru: “———”

The moment he was about to touch her, Beatrice looked at Subaru.

And then, in that instant, her eyes filled with waves of emotion, Subaru’s hand stopped. Because it was as if she——

Beatrice: “That question of yours, are words querying about someone eaten by Gluttony.”

Subaru: “——! So, you...”

¹⁶ English flip. Means “Yes or no” (はいかいいえ), originally “YESかNO” (yes or no).

Beatrice: “This sort of thing, if one is familiar with the Authority of Gluttony, is not difficult to deduce I suppose. Roswaal too, and Nii-cha, and Shaula would all know this as well.”

Subaru: “Ros...!?”

An unexpected name flying out, Subaru’s throat clogged up.

Roswaal knowing the Authority of Gluttony — does that mean there might be a chance that he remembers Rem? No but before that,

Subaru: “How much do you guys know about the Witch Cult? Even Roswaal should have known, that once Emilia’s identity as a half-elf was known to the public, the Witch Cult would start taking action. Yet, if I didn’t do anything, the Mansion and the village would all have been destroyed. What is going on?”

Beatrice: “...”

Subaru: “There is no way he didn’t plan anything, that was what Rem and Crusch-san told me. Yet, it looks to me like he didn’t prepare for anything at all, because if he did, how could it have end up so catastrophically...”

Beatrice: “Betty doesn’t know how much Roswaal has thought about it I suppose. But... I don’t think Roswaal would have thought nothing on it.”

Listening to Beatrice’s statement, Subaru narrowed his brows, trying to pick out some indication of Roswaal’s preparations at work during the battle against Petelgeuse. Yet, no matter how much Subaru searched through his memories, he couldn’t find anything of the sort.

Subaru: “Is it a misconception? Or are we overestimating his capabilities? If Roswaal did something, then why was I faced with so much trouble...”

Beatrice: “If you don’t know, then no one could possibly know.”

Her sigh carried a color of disappointment, Beatrice seemed to have given up on his lack of understanding. Even though he was displeased by her attitude, Subaru noticed the conversation had strayed off-topic.

Subaru: “Wait, compared to that, if you know something about the Witch Cult, tell me everything. About the Sin Archbishops, about Gluttony, there’s a mountain of things I want to ask you... and this too.”

One after another, Subaru wanted to ask Beatrice everything.

Subaru put his hand into his jacket, and took out a book with black binding. The book, dirtied with blackish blood on the cover and partially on the inside, was the loot he received after a fierce battle against a formidable opponent, several days ago.

Subaru: “I know this thing is a really important and deep part of the Witch Cult... I can’t read what’s inside, but as the guardian of the Forbidden Library you might know something...”

Beatrice: “—A Gospel.”

Looking at the book in Subaru’s hands, Beatrice’s eyes opened wide.

Her peach-colored lips trembled, staring at the Gospel with a frozen gaze.

The illegible words written on the cover — she skimmed over them, and with an incredulous expression,

Beatrice: “Why do you, of all people, have...”

Subaru: “I plundered it, but it’s not that I actually wanted it, you know. Like I said, the Witch Cult had the mansion surrounded. So I took it off of their leader. The owner... doesn’t exist in this world anymore.”

Beatrice: “Took it... but, that.”

Beatrice’s voice quivered, as she reached out her hands for the Gospel held by Subaru.

Though he hesitated, seeing Beatrice’s small fingers trembling, Subaru slowly placed the Gospel in her hands. Receiving the book, as if checking, she traced her finger over the mysterious letters on the front cover, and

Beatrice: “Its owner... died, you said, I suppose?”

Subaru: “...Yeah. He’s dead. He got engulfed by the carriage wheels and... I killed him.”

All things considered, Petelgeuse wasn’t directly killed by Subaru.

But still, everything from the reason, the circumstances, to the events leading up to the reality of his demise, were all inevitable extensions of Subaru's actions.

Subaru wanted to kill Petelgeuse, for if he didn't take that man's life in a duel to the death, in his soul, he would never be able to forgive himself.

Therefore, Subaru had no reservations about his intention to murder Petelgeuse.

But even without reservations, it could not be said that dirtying his hands did not leave him with any regrets. He could not pretend it didn't affect him, nor would his heart lie for him on this matter. The fact that he killed Petelgeuse, and had been killed by Petelgeuse as well, he will never be able to forget.

For as long as he lives, he will be carrying the life he took from that man — But these sentiments did not come out of Subaru's mouth.

Petelgeuse was an existence that deserved to die, and Subaru, believing this, murdered him.

That's all.

But, to all these thoughts carried within his words, Beatrice did not show any reaction. She only quietly murmured I see...", keeping her eyes dropped down at the Gospel in her hands,

Beatrice: "So even you went leaving Betty, huh, Juice..."

Subaru: "—? Who is that?"

Beatrice: "There is no need for you to know. What happened to the Witch Factor, if you have killed Sloth I suppose?"

Subaru: "Witch, Factor...?"

At Beatrice's question, Subaru wrinkled his brows and tilted his head.

Seeing this gesture from Subaru, Beatrice's expression was one of bafflement, and she narrowed her eyes as if trying to read Subaru's emotions from his expression. But, searching, her gaze could not find what it was looking for.



Illustration from Volume 10, coloring by Norvak ([source](#))

Subaru clicked his tongue in agitation,

Subaru: “Tch, don’t use professional terminologies on a guy who doesn’t know anything about the situation, come on. What is that, Witch Factor? Ugh, sounds wonderful already.”

Beatrice: “You don’t know...? Wait, seriously? Then, for what reason did you kill Sloth I suppose? I don’t understand.”

Subaru: “I was just getting rid of falling sparks! What are you trying to tell me!”

The conversation that just doesn’t seem to mesh is straining Subaru’s patience, but unlike Subaru, who was trying to force the pace, Beatrice is getting closer and closer to a complete silence. Placing the back of her hand against her lips, as if in deep thought, she only continued gazing at the front cover of the book,

Beatrice: “I, don’t know... This is beyond Betty’s ability to decide.”

Subaru: “What are you trying to decide alone— Hey!”

Shaking her head, Beatrice threw the Gospel at Subaru. Quickly catching the thrown book, Subaru breathed a small sigh of relief and,

Subaru: “What are you doing all of a sudden. I’m not saying it’s dangerous, but it is still an eerie book. Handle it more carefully!”

Beatrice: “—You should hold onto it, I suppose. What would the Witch Factor choose, or not choose... Either way, a decision will be forced? When that time comes, if it helps you in your decision, Juice would be able to pass on peacefully too, I suppose.”

Subaru: “What do you mean a beverage passing on! You’re...!”

Nothing at all, Subaru understood none of it as he clung to the incomprehensible words. But, before Subaru could say anything, there was a strange feeling forming behind him.

—There was the sound of space being bent by an unnatural force. Subaru instinctively understood, though he didn’t know why he knew this,

Subaru: “Are you going to kick me out? I haven’t been able ask you anything yet... You want me to leave with just this, seriously!?”

Beatrice: “The answers you want to hear, and the words you want to hear— Why must Betty say them I suppose? Selfish... Stop being prideful.”

Subaru: “Pri...! —Just tell me, I want to know! I won’t ask for anymore! So, please...”

Beatrice: “—Betty is...”

All the hair of his back stood on end — for they were being physically drawn backwards by a force pulling Subaru’s entire body back.

Space was distorting — only when he turned his head to look behind him, he saw that the door which was supposed to be shut, had been opened, and he knew that the space of absolute darkness shall soon engulf him.

No wind was blowing, nor were his legs or arms being grabbed by anything.

Only, there was an indescribable pressure all over his body from the front, and a gravitational force invisible to naked eyes from the rear, as if embracing him, pulling him away.

—Absolute and forceful, it was the true form of Door Crossing.

Subaru: “Beako... Beatrice!”

Beatrice: “What is trying to get out is your body, and your soul.”

Subaru: “What are you—”

Beatrice: “Your heart doesn’t want to hear the true answers, because of your weakness your gaze avoids reality, and your selfish mind does not want to look at your own sins. All this, distances your body further from this Forbidden Library.”

But,

Subaru: “I—”

Beatrice: “Betty is not... a convenient tool for you.”

Subaru: “—!?”

Beatrice: “What you want to hear, when you want to hear it, in words you want to hear, in the way you want to hear it... I am not a convenient existence, like that.”

As these words wrenched through Beatrice’s lips, Subaru could not pronounce another syllable. They penetrated deep, and pierced the mark, and completely unprepared, Subaru was mauled by those word into speechless astonishment.

Then, as void emerged, Subaru’s body’s resistance collapsed, and—

Subaru: “Cra—”

This way, as if being sucked into the door behind him, Subaru’s body was pulled toward the Door Crossing.

If he goes through, he would be kicked out of the Library. At the last moment, Subaru grabbed the edge of the door, and as his other half was about to swing out, he stomped onto the other end.

Panting, clenching his teeth tightly, he looked up— in front, there was a girl with an expression full of sorrow.

Beatrice: “If you have something you want to know, ask Roswaal. —Nii-cha or Betty, won’t say anything to you.”

Subaru: “...Why are you, almost crying?”

At Subaru’s final query, Beatrice cast down her eyes, and did not respond.

At last, the girl extended her fingertips and wrapped them around Subaru’s fingers on the door — and took them off.

Sucked in. Thrown off. Locked out.

To the door, from the Forbidden Library — by the heart of a girl named Beatrice.

Subaru: “———”

Sliding through, the door vomited him out and sent him flying into the hallway. In front of his eyes, the door that threw him out closed up violently, seeing this Subaru extended out his hand to the flap, but it was too late.

Subaru: “That Drill Loli...”

The other side of the door was not the Forbidden Library, only another unused guest room. He looked around at the Mansion, but couldn’t feel the sixth-sense which connects him to the Forbidden Library.

—Today, he can’t meet her anymore.

This realization fell on Subaru’s heart.

What he wanted to hear, what he wanted to know, rather than that, he was only turned round-and-round by the girl’s mystifying words, and kicked out before gaining anything.

Subaru: “What the hell! If you know something, then cough it up, you stingy brat! You mopey shut-in-hikikomori! What kind of child of the Natsuki Family do you think you are?”

Subaru kicked at the door which up until a few moments ago had been connected to the Forbidden Library and let out a long sigh.

Shaking his head, he tried to forget the image in his mind — The last thing he saw at the time of their parting, Beatrice’s expression, would not leave him.

But, surely she was...

Subaru: “With a face almost crying like that, stop shutting yourself in all alone, stupid.”

Thinking it was his fault that she had that expression on her face, and having accomplished nothing, he could not blame her at all.

Arc 4 Chapter 4 - The Next Place

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 10, Chapter 1 “At the Place of Return”, Part 6

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#)

—After Beatrice ejected him from the Forbidden Library, Subaru returned to everyone in the living room empty-handed, looking rather ashamed of himself.

Awaiting him, the living room was the same as when he left. The only difference was that Otto was now sitting in Subaru’s seat, and seemed to have just finished discussing something with Emilia.

Putting on a face that left no doubt in anyone’s mind just how much he resented another guy talking to Emilia in anything vaguely resembling an intimate way, Subaru headed towards Otto.

Subaru: “I see you’re happily chatting with Emilia-tan while I was gone, it would be nice if you go and drop dead now.”

Otto: “It’s not in my nature to just sit around silently and let time pass... More importantly, what kind of sane person says a line like that immediately after coming back!? It’s very unpleasant when you always take your anger out on me you know!”

Subaru: “D-don’t talk like you can understand! As soon as I buy your oil and fulfill my promise, it’s all over between us, we’re through! So don’t get the wrong idea here!”¹⁷

Otto: “Could you please not talk like there’s something between us that might cause a misunderstanding!?”

¹⁷ T/N by TranslationChicken - In a girly voice, mocking Otto.

In the short span of time it took Otto to yell at him for being a *tsundere*, Subaru, as if suddenly completely losing interest, turned towards Emilia. Kept out of the conversation, she was clearly waiting for him and Otto to finish talking, and seeing him looking at her, she looked back up at him and asked,

Emilia: “—Were you able to meet with Beatrice?”

A surprisingly difficult question. On the one hand, the answer to her question was *hai*, but the answer to the question she was actually asking was closer to an *iie*¹⁸. While he had been able to make contact with her, he hadn’t actually broached the most essential topic. He almost wanted to laugh at what a limp, indecisive, cowardly Adventure RPG protagonist he was.

Subaru: “No, it just wasn’t happening.”

Emilia: “Oh... Oh well, I guess that was to be expected. When Beatrice hides using Door Crossing, I guess there’s no way to find her. Neither Ram nor I have managed to meet her after all, so...”

Subaru: “Ehm, actually, I did manage to find her. But she was, how should I say this... I guess she was in a bad mood, a bit mooney... Anyway, I wasn’t able to get an answer from her. Stupid, right?”

Emilia: “You... found her?”

Having thought that he’d never been able to make contact with her in the first place, Emilia’s eyes widened in astonishment. A bit surprised by her reaction, Subaru let out an “Ah?” and nodded his head.

Emilia: “I’ve been thinking this for a while, but... You and Beatrice are actually really close, aren’t you?”

Emilia murmured in a low voice, lightly touching her lower lip with her finger as though pondering something.

In response, Subaru put on his best disapproving frown, working hard to further improve the expression that was shaping his face into something no one could misinterpret.

¹⁸ Same language flip as before (yes/no).

Subaru: “Me and Beako, friends? Please... She’s like my arch-nemesis, ever since the moment we met. The first time we met she sucked out all my Mana you know!? I don’t think there’s enough time left in the world for that horrible first impression to go away!”

Emilia: “Even though you made up with Julius? After all that happened between you. Subaru you’re like this sometimes, being stubborn in a reeeeaally meaningless way.”

Subaru: “Being meaninglessly stubborn is the measure of a man! I’m the kind of guy who continues to carry around that kind of stupid idea, even though I know it’s a bunch of crap. Plus, I have not made up with Julius. I, hate, that guy, *sue-shi-juu*¹⁹!”

Emilia: “Sure, sure.”

Emilia lightly brushed aside his disingenuous objections with a small laugh. Seeing this, Subaru screwed up his face to show his dissatisfaction. However, on the inside, he just felt relieved that the subject had been laid to rest.

He still hadn’t had time to process his conversation with Beatrice. The sad expression on her face at the very end, he had no idea of how to even begin to make sense of it.

Subaru: “By the way, where’s Frederica gone off to? How could her good judgment be so lacking that she would leave my Emilia-tan and Otto alone together...”

Emilia: “Setting aside the matter of me supposedly belonging to anyone for another time... Frederica has gone off to prepare one of the guest rooms... Since we’re going to need a place for Rem-san to rest.”

Subaru: “Ah, I see.”

Subaru responded in a low whisper. Emilia, looking pained, narrowed her eyes.

While he hated himself for causing this expression on her face, he simply couldn’t hold back the rending pain filling up his chest every time he was reminded of Rem. However, with a blink and a shake of his

¹⁹ English flip. Means “forever” (未始終), originally “ふぉーえぱー” (For-e-veeeeer).

head, he extinguished the grief from his expression to keep his pain from extending to Emilia. Relaxing his lips, he said,

Subaru: "In that case, I better get Rem from the dragon carriage. She shouldn't be lying out there all alone... Oh, sorry about what I said before, Otto."

Otto: "No, no, I don't blame you. After all, I sense that... a lot has happened between her and Natsuki-san. I can hardly ask you to have your emotions in check given the circumstances."

Subaru: "It's just that when I think of you touching my Rem with your dirty, money-grubbing hands, I can't help myself... I'm really sorry."

Otto: "There's no way you'd say something like that if you were really sorry! I also really don't think that's a line a person who just labelled a totally different girl as his should be saying!!"

Subaru: "That's just me using you in my plan to make Emilia-tan fall jealously in love with me. Don't make me say it out loud, idiot."

Otto: "You said that out loud all on your own!!"

Grinning at Otto's reliably explosive reaction, Subaru snuck a glance at Emilia's face. Having been intently observing their exchange, Emilia's lips seemed to soften just a little, and the sorrow of moments ago had all disappeared. Confirming this, Subaru drew a small sigh of relief.

Emilia: "Subaru and Otto-kun seem to be reeaally close. Even though you only met just recently..."

Subaru: "Huh, that's what you got jealous at!? Compared to my feelings for you, Otto is just a toy, a plaything on the side! I want a real and passionate relationship with you, Emilia-tan!"

Otto: "Why am I the one being discarded!? Even though this whole thing has no basis in reality, I still really don't like that!!"

Seeing the two guys heat up more and more, Emilia suddenly burst out laughing. Covering her mouth with her hand, her shoulders shuddering with laughter, Emilia managed to squeeze out an "I'm sorry" before she was finally able to continue.

Emilia: “I don’t think this is the kind of situation where I should be laughing like this, but I just can’t help myself... Are you sure you two haven’t actually known each other for a really long time?”

Subaru: “He’s a travelling merchant you know? Once his business is over, he’ll be out of here before you know it... Actually, just the thought of an unshipped male character other than myself coming near Emilia-tan, aaah I can’t stand it!”

Otto: “I don’t know what that is, but in the short time I’ve gotten to know you I can already tell it’s probably something really awful, so I don’t like it—!”

Seeing Otto putting his hands on his head with a somewhat traumatized expression on his face, Subaru snorted loudly, twisting his mouth.

In a way, those exaggerations were actually his true feelings. Ever since baring his heart to Emilia, Subaru chased her with an air of indomitable invincibility, and his heart is set ablaze with jealousy whenever another guy approaches her. This is surely because the depth of his possessiveness, and jealousy, are both many times that of any normal person.

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The rampant conversation in the living room was coming to an end just as Frederica returned from preparing the guest room.

Otto: “I was thinking, I’d like to check on how things are in the village nearby. Since I’m holding onto the certificates for the other merchants regarding the purchasing of their cargo, I can, to an extent, take care of distributing things to the village. Though I’ll get the Margrave to pay for the costs later, of course.”

After saying this, as if the fatigue from the long trip did not affect him at all, Otto hustled off towards the village.

No matter how much he showed the face of a calculative merchant, his proposal was, as 60% of the evacuees had not yet returned, nothing short of aid and support for the still nonfunctional Arlam Village.

Watching Otto hide all this behind a money-hungry demeanor, Subaru was forced to quickly cover up his sense of gratitude by pretending to spit on the ground.

Frederica: “I have prepared a room in the servants’ quarters as instructed... Strangely, there was only one room that appeared to have been thoroughly cleaned.”

Subaru: “Thoroughly cleaned... The innermost room on the second floor?”

Frederica: “—Yes, that’s right. Only that room seemed clean, as if everything had been thrown out except the bed... Do you, know something about it?”

As Frederica spoke of the room she had just prepared, Subaru struggled hard to keep his grief from emerging in his eyes.

The room she talked about — The innermost room on the Mansion’s second floor in the eastern wing, was the room Rem had used. Hearing the explanation that everything in the room must have been tidied up, Subaru deeply felt the overwhelming power of Gluttony’s Authority: eradication of existence.

Subaru: “...No. I just had a hunch, there’s no real meaning behind it.”

Frederica, who saw the truth behind Subaru’s words, didn’t say a thing.

She too, seemed to possess an extraordinarily excellent disposition as a maid. Most likely, Rem and Frederica were the two who had kept Roswaal’s overly spacious mansion functioning... Ram doesn’t count.

Going around back of the Mansion, a soft snorting sound greeted Subaru as he headed towards the dragon carriage.

Looking at where the carriage was parked, he saw an unfamiliar building that looked like a storehouse — most likely it was the place used to shelter dragon carriages, like a garage. He saw the building, and Patrasche stabled in the adjacent barn. The ground dragon with jet black skin let out a valiant cry, extending her neck out towards the approaching Subaru in a gesture of tenderness. Placing a fingertip against the approaching nostrils, he tickled the rough skin.

Subaru: “Sorry I never thanked you properly, Patrasche. A lot of things happened, and I know it’s late, but I’m counting on you from here on out too, partner.”

Patrashe: “...”

In answer to Subaru’s words, Patrasche licked the palm of his hand with her rough tongue. Looking at their friendly exchange, Frederica tilted her head.

Frederica: “She really cherishes you. One look, and anyone could tell she is a competent ground dragon, yet to see how tamed she is... It’s astounding.”

Subaru: “I haven’t done anything close to taming her? If normal ground dragons are difficult to pet and hug, then I guess it’s just because Patrasche has a deeper emotional capacity than the others. Or, maybe I’m just so incapable, she can’t leave me be.”

It’s not like Subaru was being humble, it was simply the only way he could appraise Patrasche’s loveliness. Within just three or four days from meeting her, how many times had he had his life saved by this soft-hearted ground dragon. Conversely, Subaru hadn’t done anything for her in return yet. He couldn’t help but think his meeting with this ground dragon was nothing short of a blessing.

As though understanding Subaru’s self-assessment, Patrasche extended her head, which was licking Subaru’s hands, and rubbed her muzzle against the inattentive Subaru’s cheek. Surprised at the sudden offensive, Subaru smiled wryly at the raspy sensation on his face.

Frederica: “I think I understood what kind of person Subaru-sama is. —You, have your own hardships.”

Subaru: “...”

Instead of Subaru, who had his hands full with Patrasche, Frederica’s words and kind gaze were directed at Patrasche, who was frolicking with him. Patrasche stopped her movements for a moment at the deep emotion behind Frederica’s words, looking at her with the pupils of a reptile, before resuming her toying of Subaru.

In that moment, the women somehow understood each other, and Subaru was completely unaware. Anyways,

Subaru: “Sorry for making you wait, Rem. I’m sure it was cramped and dark, right? I’m gonna carry you to your room now, okay?”

After spending some time playing with Patrasche, he headed for where the dragon carriage was parked — in other words, to where Rem had been left sleeping.

There was no change, Rem was still in a deep sleep. She didn’t raise any objections. Sulking at being left behind, her head turned away, cheeks puffed out saying “Subaru-kun is so mean!” or laughing at Subaru’s apology — None of that will happen.

Frederica: “—I heard about it earlier, but still I am surprised.”

From behind Subaru, who was immersed in nostalgia, Frederica, who saw Rem for the first time, was unable to hide her surprise. When Subaru tilted his head at Frederica’s surprised response, she quietly shook her head.

Frederica: “Nothing. It is just, her face looks very similar to the Ram I know. The only difference I see is the color of the hair... Twins, as you said.”

Subaru: “I’m sure it must be hard to believe, what with losing your memories and all, but I’m glad you believed me. It would make me glad if you remembered her, without thinking it was some kind of cruel joke.”

Nodding at the reason for Frederica’s surprise, Subaru stretched his palm out to touch Rem’s cheek. Somehow, he felt no warmth nor coldness. There was no doubt all her life-functions were active, but there was nothing left living within her.

Confirming what he had already checked countless times, Subaru again received an incurable wound to the depths of his heart. Even knowing this, he still could not help but check.

Frederica: “Subaru-sama. It would be fine for me to carry...”

Subaru: “I want to do it. Please let me. I want to be the one that takes Rem to the Mansion... to her room. Sorry I’m being selfish.”

Frederica: “Not at all, it’s really touching. Your eyes look like those of a murderer, but you are kind, I see.”

Subaru: “I also have a heart that gets damaged from such casual dissing!”

Responding to Frederica’s words, Subaru wrapped Rem up in his arms. He has carried her several times now to move her, but even so he was reminded of how light she was.

It was with this body she had stood in front of him, fighting hard to protect his useless self. The more he dwelt on this, the more he thought of just how precious she is to him.

Subaru: “I’ll wake you, as soon as I can. So, please, scold me angrily for feeling the softness of your body with these fingertips of mine.”

Frederica: “It was such a good line, until you had to go and ruin it.”

Subaru exited the dragon carriage, leaving Frederica’s disgruntled words behind him.

He nodded a quick goodbye to Patrasche, who had poked her head out of the stables. Subaru then entered the mansion, led by Frederica. Led to the room on the eastern wing — The bedroom, the room that once was Rem’s.

Frederica: “You talked, with Beatrice-sama.”

The statement was thrown out abruptly, as they walked.

Subaru, who had been carefully going up the stairs, looked up at Frederica’s back. She narrowed the pupils of her sharp eyes and looked back down at Subaru with a gaze that held only intimidation. Although, Subaru understood it was only a misunderstanding, as he had the same kind of eyes, with more white area than was usual.

Coming to the correct assumption that his silence was affirmation at her question, Frederica said,

Frederica: “Is she doing well? I ask because, since my return to the Mansion, I have yet to see her face.”

Subaru: “I already told Emilia-tan, but she was doing ok... I guess. Though, I couldn’t talk to her as much as I normally do, since she was in a worse mood than usual.”

Frederica: "Is... that so."

As though anxious, her expression at Subaru's answer was not a bright one.

Seeing that look, Subaru couldn't help but wonder about something. It was about what the role of the girl named Beatrice actually was in the Mansion. Up until now, Subaru had not dug deep into her position or background.

The girl, in the mansion of Margrave Roswaal, stayed in a mysterious magical space, the Forbidden Library, and was treated by Rem and Ram as both guest and nobility.

Then again, she seems to childishly adore Puck, a spirit contracted to Emilia, a candidate for the Royal Selection, as though he were an older brother. Also, the way she behaved towards Subaru seemed appropriate for her age, though her actions during their last encounter—they were all mysteries.

Subaru: "Umm, Frederica, you've been working in the mansion for a while?"

Frederica: "Oh, are you interested? Emilia-sama, the girl in your arms... and Beatrice-sama...you seem to have a lot of interests."

Subaru: "Stop mixing Beako in so smoothly, I'm not interested in young kids. You can see that both my hands are filled with Emilia-tan and Rem, right? Frederica is... Honestly, it's only been a short time, but you're not my type."

Frederica: "Oh, I'm hated."

Subaru: "It's no good, you trying to yank my chain feels just like what one of Roswaal's maids would do. Oh, and it's only an issue of personal preference, I don't hate you or anything."

Frederica's eyes danced, and she laughed at Subaru's comeback, while covering her mouth with its cruel-looking fangs.

Frederica: "I'm not much concerned. You, also seem to be a worrywart."

Subaru: "It's because I hurt you when we first met. You laughed it off, but it still hurt a bit, didn't it?"

Frederica: "..."

At Subaru's words, Frederica's eyes flickered with an expression of surprise this time. The smile wiped from her face, she stared at him. The gold in her eyes sparkling, she slid her gaze to meet his, and Subaru was met with the sensation that she was trying to look through him.

Slowly letting out a small sigh, Frederica said,

Frederica: "It is not very often that someone sees into my heart. I would appreciate it, if you refrained from doing so."

Subaru: "I just tried to put back together what I'd trampled over. Besides, I'm one to talk, what with my eyes being just as fierce looking... Well, for me it's the whole family though."

Since both his parents had naturally fierce expressions, their son had it too.

During dinner, they all wore the same expressions as they squirted out mayonnaise from their own personal tubes, and it probably looked as though they were performing some black magic ritual around the dining table. Frowning as he saw his own memories objectively, Frederica deepened her sigh even further.

Frederica: "You are not a discomforting guy, just really strange. I think I understand why Emilia-sama behaves the way she does."

Subaru: "Emilia-tan, what?"

Frederica: "It is nothing. This time, Emilia-sama would truly be upset with me. What will you do once you know how long I have worked here?"

Shaking her head, Frederica shifted the topic back. Even though he couldn't make sense of those words, Subaru too returned to the original topic.

Subaru: "So the thing is, I wanted to talk about Beako... Beatrice. If you worked here as a maid for a long time, then I wanted to ask how long she's been living in the Mansion."

He hadn't voiced it as a question or anything, but from Subaru's estimation, Frederica was several years older, around twenty-two or twenty-three. Even if she was a veteran maid of ten years, and since

Beatrice was around twelve now by all accounts, all he had to do was count back and he could come up with an estimate.

But, at Subaru's question, Frederica shook her head.

Frederica: "I am sorry, but I do not know. Beatrice-sama has shut herself up in the Library a long time, since before I started working in this Mansion."

Subaru: "Ah, well I guess it can't be helped. Your background as a maid doesn't necessarily mean it directly correlates with how long you've worked in Ros-chi's Mansion. So you came to the mansion as an expert maid then..."

Frederica: "No, that is not the case, Subaru-sama."

Frederica interrupted Subaru, who felt his conclusion had been denied by a rather plausible reason.

As Subaru furrowed his brows, she straightened her back, and complemented by her vicious countenance and a noticeable concern, she said,

Frederica: "The only place I have worked at as a maid, is here at the Master's mansion. And when I was first taken in as a servant, I was twelve years old. That was over ten years ago."

Subaru: "...Wait, isn't that weird? Because, calculating back since then, that would mean Beako has been shut-up in that moldy room from when she was a toddler."

Frederica: "Don't you, already know?"

As though criticizing Subaru's stubbornness, Frederica shook her head. With her attitude confirming a doubt he had held within his heart, Subaru understood what he had tried to avoid thinking about too deeply. In other words, the girl in the library—

Subaru: "Her appearance hasn't changed... I guess she really isn't human then."

Frederica: “Since the beginning of the Mathers Family, the librarian who took an Oath to continue watching over the Forbidden Library — that is who she is, the Great Spirit²⁰ Beatrice-sama.”

Unable to detect a lie in her words, Subaru was left with no choice but to accept them.

The true identity of the girl he had interacted with until now, was an existence that belonged to a completely different dimension.

Subaru: “Great Spirit... That title is the same as Puck’s, but she looks really different and all.”

Frederica: “It relates to the absence of a contract and the Oath... no, this is more than I should say. Please forget it.”

Subaru: “Impossible, totally impossible.”

How many times had Subaru’s ignorance caused him to be dragged around by what other people knew but wouldn’t share?

Frederica did not care about Subaru’s scornful glare and tightened her lips, it seems she had no intention of touching the subject again. At her attitude and behavior, Subaru sighed, recognizing that he would be unable to pursue talking about Beatrice.

Remembering their talk had continued on while their legs had ceased moving,

Subaru: “Frederica...”

Frederica: “Forgive me, Subaru-sama. My tongue was a little too loose. I was just glad someone appeared that cares about Beatrice-sama. Please, forgive me.”

Subaru: “It’s okay, but my arms are at their limit.”

His upper arms shaking, Subaru looked up at Frederica with a stiff expression on his face.

²⁰ Even though the Japanese is exactly the same as for Puck (大精霊), Beatrice does not belong to the group of the Four Great Spirits (四大精霊).

He was acting strong because “it’s a light light body” and “anything’s possible with love”, but things like his arm strength, muscle stamina, and so on, ignored those lines, attacking him in force.

Frederica: “Oh, oh.”

Subaru: “So, step away, please!”

Subaru swore to himself he would never do something as foolish as setting Rem down on the floor, or handing her to Frederica; then brushed past her and her offer to switch, heading to the guest room with hurried steps.

The sounds of soft footfalls running echoed from behind, it seemed Frederica was following behind him. Reflecting on the horrible way he had ended their talk, he arrived in front of Rem’s room.

Emilia: “—You really, took your time.”

Emilia said, her expression showing how monotonous her wait for Subaru had been.

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Laying Rem down on the bed, Subaru pulled the quilts up over her chest. The beating of her heart, and the rise and fall of her chest as she breathed, gave testament to the fact that she still lives. Until the day her eyes open again, he wondered just how much time she would spend here.

Subaru: “I guess that’ll depend on how hard I try, huh...”

Turning his feelings into a new Oath, Subaru gently brushed away Rem’s hair resting on her brow, and then, he turned around to face Emilia, who had been standing silently behind him.

Subaru: “Sorry for making you wait. Frederica and I ended up talking about all sorts of things, and I wound up with some serious build-up of lactic acid in my biceps.”

Emilia: “It’s wonderful if you were sidetracked in conversation. What were you and Frederica talking about?”

Subaru: “I started by asking some questions relating to rehabilitating the shut-in little girl. How long has she been shut-in, when did it start, how she treated people after it happened... They’re all closely related to her recovery.”

Emilia: “Hmmm, I see. Subaru, you’re really informed when it comes to shut-ins. It’s amazing.”

Subaru: “Emilia-tan, I’m sure you didn’t mean it but... your words sometimes cut me to my core. Just like right now.”

It was a bit disconcerting how genuinely she seemed to be praising him. Emilia, her expression purely innocent, tilted her head and looked at Subaru, who was frowning. He replied with a wry smile and shrugged his shoulders.

Emilia: “So, you weren’t able to get Beatrice to tell you anything, then?”

Subaru: “Her mouth is shut firm and she doesn’t budge. By the way, I know I’ve asked this a lot already but... Where’s Puck?”

Emilia: “—No luck, there’s still no response. This happens once in a while, but the timing is reeeally horrible this time. Geez, this is really distressing.”

Reaching into her shirt, Emilia pulled out the green crystal stone. Fit in a pendant, the stone was faintly glowing. Within, a bewitching light swirled where the Great Spirit resided. It was the link that sealed the contract between Emilia and Puck, and Subaru, having seen his materialized form going in and out of that crystal almost daily, knew this as well. Only, as one could deduce from their conversation, there has been no hint of him within the crystal stone these past few days. He was gone—

—It was hard to believe, but he wasn’t responding to their calls.

Subaru: “This, happens sometimes? But, that’s got to be really exasperating for you.”

Emilia: “Whenever I really, really need Puck’s help, he always comes. So, I don’t think he’s not watching... I’ve asked him about what he does when he’s not around, but he’s never told me.”

Hearing Emilia’s apologetic words, Subaru scratched his head, saying, “That’s...”. He couldn’t hide his disappointment at the fact that Puck, who was aware of everything, would choose to remain silent. With

this, all the important figures he could have relied upon for help with his doubts, had all gone silent at once.

Subaru: “Puck and Beako, both quit talking to me at the same time... This blows.”

Emilia: “I know... Hey, Subaru, what should we do?”

Subaru, resting his hand on his forehead, was in deep thought when Emilia asked him for his decision.

He cast down his eyes at her call. Seeing the reliance and trust that dwelt within her gaze, he despised himself for feeling so happy at a time such as this. Realizing that she was relying on him, out of that trapped, stifling feeling, he understood what he must do.

Subaru: “Since the two who might actually know something suddenly went quiet, we really don’t have a choice but to move on... Although, even if we find that guy, whether he’ll tell us anything is another matter...”

Emilia: “You mean Roswaal, right?”

Subaru: “Yeah, it’s about time he spilled his guts and told us everything that’s been going on, I think.”

Seeing Emilia’s grasp of the situation, Subaru nodded his head. Since she recognized his train of thought, she was probably thinking the same thing as well.

Emilia placed a hand over her chest and seemed relieved that their opinions aligned.

Emilia: “I’m so glad, that Subaru agrees with me. I was wondering what I would do if you object to my proposals like Roswaal and Ram always do.”

Subaru: “I might disagree depending on the details, but overall, I’m 100% behind Emilia-tan, you know? Even if I disagree with you, it’ll always be because of my love for Emilia-tan, I hope you can believe me.”

Emilia: “Love... —Subaru, you reeeally know how to pick the opportunity to flirt.”

Subaru’s irresponsible pick-up line took Emilia by surprise, and she quickly turned her face away. Subaru’s cheeks were reddening slightly as well as he clenched his fists, while Emilia, still refusing to look at him, said,

Emilia: “Then, I have a proposal for you, Subaru, since you’re always on my side.”

Subaru: “Alright, let’s hear it, whatever you want.”

Subaru placed a hand to his chest in respectful subservience. Seeing this, Emilia closed one of her eyes saying, “Since you said it so nicely”, pursing up her lips and looking back at him.

Then, taking a moment to let out a deep breath, Emilia stared directly into Subaru’s dark pupils.

Emilia: “There are things we need to talk about with Roswaal, and we also have to know what happened with the villagers, right? That’s why, I want to go to the Sanctuary.”

Subaru: “Sanctuary...”

It was the name of a place he had heard countless times at the Roswaal mansion. Subaru had unfortunately never been able to find out where it was, but the evacuees led by Ram had headed there to avoid the Witch Cult. At the very least, now that the sect of the Witch Cult led by Petelgeuse had been annihilated, the threat level at the Sanctuary should be no more than that of the mansion.

Emilia: “I’ve been told it’s a place I’d need to visit sometime anyway, so I think this is the perfect time. I’ve decided that this time, I’ll finally talk with Roswaal about everything.”

Subaru: “W, wa, wai, wait a minute! You aren’t thinking of leaving me behind are you!?”

Emilia: “Eh?”

Holding his hand up in front of him at Emilia’s enthusiastic words, Subaru put a damper on her decisive declaration. But even so, Subaru had to say it.

Subaru: “Emilia-tan, I know you’re getting pumped, and I’m in agreement, but you can’t just leave me behind. I know I’m weak and dimwitted, but I’d hate it if I couldn’t try my best by your side. I know it’s selfish, but please understand!”

Hearing Subaru’s ardent, relentless words, Emilia’s eyes widened.

But they were unmistakably his true thoughts. Subaru was going to stay with Emilia. If he wasn’t with her, he couldn’t protect her. He couldn’t do anything for her. There was no pretense to his feelings, it

was simply that his existence was necessary to help her. It had nothing to do with him wanting something in return, it was simply what he wanted to do.

Emilia's expression still showed her astonishment at the forcefulness of Subaru's words. Deciding that now would be the best time to throw her off balance, he continued.

Subaru: "It's no use if you try and stop me. I'm going with you. I've no intention of getting left behind. Whether it's the Sanctuary or Roswaal we're going to face, nothing will stand in the way of my burning love for—"

Emilia: "There's no way I'd leave you behind. Come with me."

Subaru: "I don't want to get left behind, no no no! —Wait, what did you say?"

Subaru, still half-way down on the floor and about ready to grovel and plead, asked Emilia this question. Seeing his display, Emilia placed a hand against her lips, her face reddening ever so slightly.

Emilia: "Like I said, come with me. I'd be too anxious if it was just me."

Subaru: "Eh, Emilia-tan..."

Emilia: "Subaru, I'm counting on you. I don't think you're weak, or dimwitted. I, need your strength."

Subaru: "——"

The impact those words had on Subaru went beyond description. His mouth agape, Emilia's face clouded over with uncertainty at his stillness. Lifting up her hand, as though struggling over whether to reach out and touch him or not,

Emilia: "Ah, uhm, wh, what's the matter? Did I say something strange again?"

Subaru: "The switch to my motivation is in your hands. Whether it's on or off, depends on just a word from you. I can't take it."

Covering his face in his hands, Subaru spoke teasingly to Emilia.

Emilia: "Eh? Eh?? What do you mean?"

Unable to read the intention behind his words, Emilia fumbled for a reply. Seeing her so confused, he almost wanted to rub it in her face. After all Subaru had just went through at her hands, he's savoring every last bit of it.

Frederica: "—It sounds like you've come to an agreement."

Subaru: "Gyaa—!?"

Their exchange, which must have looked like two people flirting, was tragically interrupted by a knock on the door followed by Frederica's entrance.

Emilia wasn't surprised by her arrival, but Subaru, trying hard to conceal the thumping of his heart, couldn't help but glare at her. Even though Frederica must have easily seen through Subaru's feelings, not a hint of it appeared in her calm, but still vicious-looking expression.

Frederica: "I have no objections about the two of you heading to the Sanctuary. However, preparations will take about two days."

Subaru: "By preparations, does that mean you're coming with us?"

Frederica: "Not at all. As I still have duties here, I will be unable to accompany you. I will instead give the directions to the Sanctuary to the ground dragon you brought back with you."

Subaru: "You mean Patrasche?"

Subaru widened his eyes at the unexpected proposition. His response received a "Why, yes" from Frederica, who continued as though it were obvious.

Frederica: "Ground dragons are very clever creatures. If you instruct them properly, they can understand which roads to take well enough that a guide is unnecessary. Since she seems especially clever, I don't think it will be an issue."

Subaru: "Patrasche, you just keep on getting more and more valuable! Really, just what triggered this turn of events?"

Frederica: "More importantly, there are several things I must tell you two—"

Subaru tilted his head trying to understand his partner, but Frederica ignored his question, straightening her muscled body, she looked at both of them,

Frederica: “If you are headed for the Sanctuary, there are several things I would like you to remember. Especially Emilia, I would like you to be careful of the issue of your birth and appearance.”

Emilia: “—Yes, I’ve prepared myself. After all, I’ve heard it’s a place with some complicated issues.”

At Frederica’s dire warnings, Emilia tightened her jaw, the look in her eyes carried her strength of will. To show he respected her decision, Subaru moved to stand beside her.

Subaru: “Honestly, I don’t know anything about that place except that it’s called the Sanctuary... But my supreme goal is to support Emilia-tan. So I’ll listen to whatever you have to say.”

Frederica: “Actually, I sense a very refreshingly pure, ulterior motive there.”

Exasperation and admiration flashed through Frederica’s eyes at the same time, then, blinking once, she pushed down her sentiment, and held up a finger.

Frederica: “In that case, let me tell you about the Sanctuary. But before that, there is one thing I need you to remember.”

Subaru: “Need us...”

Emilia: “...To remember?”

Subaru and Emilia’s heads tilted at the same time. Seeing this, Frederica nodded with a “Yes”, dropping her voice ever so slightly.

Frederica: “—Beware of someone named Garfiel. Within the Sanctuary, you two must be very careful, of coming into contact with that man.”

Arc 4 Chapter 5 - The Emilia Camp

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 10, Chapter 2 “The Road to the Sanctuary”, Part 1

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Complete](#)

Just as Frederica declared, it was two days later when they set out for the Sanctuary.

In between her duties at the mansion, Frederica had been teaching Patrasche in the stables about the location of the Sanctuary. Since she was responsible for most of the work at the mansion, Subaru suggested she could lighten her workload if she just told him the location of the Sanctuary directly, but—

Frederica: “My apologies, but the location of the Sanctuary is of great importance to our master. As a mere servant, I cannot act rashly in this matter. I would have preferred to not even teach it to the ground dragon if I could avoid it.”

So she politely refused to teach him.

Although it didn’t sit well with him, complaining about Roswaal’s over-cautiousness wouldn’t get him any closer to the Sanctuary. And considering how things were unravelling, Subaru had no choice but to submit to Frederica’s judgments.

And so, Subaru spent two uneventful days hanging out with the villagers, and, returning to the role of a servant, performing some of the menial tasks at the mansion.

All the while, pursing up her lips in annoyance that Puck still wouldn’t come out, Emilia, who also had nothing to do, would timidly follow Subaru to the village and make an effort to reduce the distance between the villagers and herself. And also, reading all sorts of books and texts Subaru couldn’t understand, she spent her time building her knowledge.

As they each spent their two days in their respective ways, there were a few changes that occurred. The first was,

Otto: “Aaah! Why is everything dumped in a heap!? Documents that need to be prioritized, documents that can be discarded as soon as they’ve been read, and documents that aren’t even worth reading, when they aren’t sorted properly it ends up like this...!”

Scratching his head violently while grumbling, Otto sorted the documents around him at an incredible speed. Quickly looking over a document and roughly grasping its contents, he tossed it into one of the giant sorted piles on the table, then onto the next, and the next, he continued to separate and organize.

Watching Otto’s eyes and hands flicker here and there, turning his head from side-to-side so quickly one would almost expect to see flames shooting out, across the table, Subaru, resting his chin in his hands, sighed in amazement,

Subaru: “Haa, that’s amazing! If it was me, even if they were printed out neatly it’ll still be gibberish to me...”

Otto: “It’s not as if I’m trying to understand them. I’m only separating them into documents relating to finances, relating to petitions, and various other types efficiently first. If only each document was sorted when they first came in... But, looking at this arrangement, it’s organized in a way that only the man himself could understand, I’m afraid.”

It was unheard of, that Subaru should find himself feeling a sense admiration for Otto, who was glaring at the mountain of documents looking rather appalled. Hearing him speak of the documents’ owner — Roswaal’s face emerged in Subaru’s mind, and he couldn’t help but feel that, despite being blurted out casually, Otto’s theory was probably spot on.

It’s a frightening thought, to think Roswaal would be so capable that he could see some kind of logic to this giant pile of documents.

But the problem was since no one else could understand it, without him here, there was no choice but to sort them all from scratch.

Otto: “Ok, it’s in broad categories now. Next, is to arrange them in chronological order... But before that, maybe I should separate them more into processed and unprocessed first...”

Subaru: “I don’t know whether I should call you meticulous or obsessive-compulsive, but Otto, you’re definitely a Type-A²¹, aren’t you?”

Otto: “What’s a Tappei²²? That doesn’t sound like anything good at all.”

Seeing Otto stare at him, Subaru waved his hand from side-to-side without bothering to explain. It’s not like he actually believed that blood type had anything to do with one’s personality, aside from being useful as a half-assed conversation topic.

Incidentally, Subaru is Type-B — Or rather, the entire Natsuki family is Type-B. Whenever this was mentioned to someone, the reply they get would always be “I knew it”, and so it wasn’t a very pleasant subject for them.

Otto: “Wait, now that I think about it...”

Subaru: “What’s that, why did you stop? You were going at such a great pace, keep going.”

Otto: “As someone who cares about efficiency, I don’t really mind doing this, but isn’t this situation a bit odd? Why am I, a travelling merchant, standing in the Margrave’s office with sweat all over my forehead working so hard to sort through his documents? Isn’t my position a bit odd here?”

Subaru: “That took you pretty long to notice, didn’t it?”

Seeing Otto only just now noticing all this, Subaru lowered his head and laughed deviously. The reason Otto was performing this menial task — rearranging documents pertaining to the Margrave’s affairs no less, was all entwined with Subaru’s schemes... That is, to secure useful talents for the Emilia-faction in the Roswaal camp.

In the present situation, as Subaru sees it, Emilia’s position in the Royal Selection isn’t good at all. As her Knight, or at least as someone generally recognized as such, he was instrumental in repulsing the

²¹ Type-A personalities are workaholics. For more information, see [here](#). Incidentally, Type-B personalities are the opposite, less competitive, stressed and more easy-going.

²² Decided to insert a pun of my own, because Otto’s unfamiliar with the concept of Type-A personalities and Type-A sounds like how the author’s name is pronounced (Tappei).

Witch Cult and slaying the White Whale, but, compared to the abysmal negativity still surrounding Emilia's situation, just how much of an effect did all this have is still a question.

Compared to each of the other camps, Emilia was behind before the race had even begun. Further increasing the difficulty of her position was the fact that her key supporter, Roswaal's true intentions are still utterly indiscernible. Although he was publicly backing her, so far, Roswaal's performance as her patron could only be described with the word «failed».

He failed to prepare a single countermeasure against the Witch Cult even though he should have foreseen it from a mile away, and now, after having overcome that threat, they don't even have a way to contact him. If he could just come out and announce whether he is an ally or enemy already... Either way, he is certainly a troubling existence.

On top of that, the people surrounding Roswaal all tended to keep their mouths shut when it comes to their master's true intentions. Revering Roswaal above all else with unquestioning devotion, Ram's behavior was only to be expected, and Frederica, with her strong dedication to her role as a servant, would not say anything either. Even Puck and Beatrice would not break their silence on the matter to Subaru and Emilia.

In other words, there was not a single person Emilia could safely confide in. Of course, Subaru wanted to become that person to her, and was in fact acting in a way befitting such an existence, but Subaru's reach was too short, even compared to an average person. He was sadly aware of the fact that he was not a man who could reach her every itch, and by himself alone, he could not wipe away her every discomfort, and this bothered him to no end.

So then, the one who caught Subaru's eye was the man going back and forth between Arlam Village and the mansion, the one who would smack his lips after dinner and tea saying things like “Aaaa, having no ambition and getting settled down like this would surely make anyone rot”, while smiling relaxedly... Otto.

Subaru: “In other words, the «if there aren't any allies around, why not start cultivating some now» battle plan.”

Otto: “I find what you suddenly said somewhat disturbing, but what does that have to do with me!?”

Subaru: “Hmm, I dunno... Maybe... Ah, Otto-san. You still haven’t sorted the documents over here.”

Otto: “Oh, sorry. Let’s see, the mining locations for arcane minerals and the quantities of their reserves and this... Aren’t these the kind of documents outsiders absolutely shouldn’t be allowed to see!?!?!?”

Subaru: “Aah, you saw... I see, you saw them... Aaah, ok, ok. Yeah, well, I’ll to do my best to explain it to Roswaal, so don’t worry, ok?”

Otto: “It’s amazing how nothing in that sentence puts me at ease!”

While Otto was complaining and trying to hold the documents he’d just been given as far away from his eyes as possible, Subaru just grinned, acting like he was only some innocent observer. Seeing Subaru’s attitude, Otto’s face took on a look of horror, and he said, with his lips shaking,

Otto: “I don’t want to believe it, but are you really trying to make me disappear by showing me documents no outsider should see, and then not coming to my defense when there’s trouble? Just to trample over the terms of our agreement?”

Subaru: “Of course not! The payment for your cargo and the favor you asked, I intend to fulfil all of them. And on top of that, I’m going to drag you even further into this, until you’re in so deep that you won’t be able to run away.”

Otto: “Do you really have to be so twisted!? I’m just a little traveling merchant, I don’t know why you are trying to put so much weight on my shoulders, but please stop it!!”

With a face that looked completely overwhelmed, Otto tried to object. Hearing this, Subaru felt he might have gone a little too far, so nodding his head lightly and changing up his expression, he mumbled “My bad” softly,

Subaru: “I went a bit too far there. I have so many different things filling up my plate, and I’m in such a hurry to sort out all these tangled threads, that I didn’t even think to ask you how you felt about it, sorry.”

Otto: “Ah, no, if you become so reasonable all of a sudden, I’ll feel disoriented... Uh, I wonder if I can ask, but... What makes you expect so much from me?”

Seeing Subaru suddenly talking to him so normally, Otto got a bit confused, but he basically accepted this, and asked him this question. After all, from his perspective, he had only known Subaru very recently, and there wasn't really anything to justify much trust between them. Of course, even for Subaru, their relationship wasn't a very strong one. They had some contact in the previous loops, so now he had a slightly favorable impression of him, but that was all. But if so, then why was he drawn to Otto like this?

Subaru: "Honestly, it's not like I have any particular reason to be interested in you or anything. It's not like I value you as an individual... so it has mostly to do with you meeting the criteria."

Otto: "That's awfully frank! —I guess I can understand... but what was the criteria?"

Subaru: "The fact that you're completely unrelated to any of the factions in the Royal Selection. And being good at weighing gains and losses, and your ability to negotiate and gather support are obviously valuable qualities. And, most importantly, you don't seem to discriminate against Emilia for being a half-elf or see her in a different way because of it."

Otto: "—"

Hearing these three reasons, Otto stared at him without saying a word. Considering the situation Subaru and the others had found themselves in, these are all conditions that cannot be neglected. And up to now, as Subaru judged, this man: Otto Suwen, was the only person to have met all of them. Otto, still without a word, was waiting for Subaru.

Unlike when they were bantering just moments earlier, his eyes were lit with a calm, calculating brightness, flickering as if trying to peer into Subaru's mind.

Subaru understood he was being evaluated. Nor was he trying to hide. He had been evaluating Otto to begin with, so of course this is only fair, but...

Subaru: "Also, and this is just my personal opinion..."

Otto: "—Let's hear it."

Subaru: "I feel like I can get along with you. Frankly, even though there is nothing better than gaining more allies for Emilia-tan, it's an extra bonus if we can get along. Ah, and also because you don't have

any feelings for Emilia-tan as a woman. Because if it ever comes to that, even if we were lifelong friends, I'll have to cut you down...!"

Otto: "You'd kill your love rivals!?"

Subaru: "If I had any rivals, I'll have zero confidence in me being able to win! Don't you underestimate my self-loathing! In my life up to this point, the number of people who actually like me can be counted with a single hand, you know!"

Specifically, his parents, Rem, Wilhelm, Emilia, and with some reservations, Julius and Reinhard... and that's about it. Actually, come to think of it, the count went past one hand just now.

Receiving this kind of appraisal after coming into this parallel world... Perhaps he was actually becoming more respectable after all. Even though he couldn't see any of it in the mirror. Anyway,

Otto: "Geez, you really are a refreshingly straightforward person. But, without any kind of reservations when sitting across a merchant on the negotiation table, you might as well be a sitting duck, you know?"

Subaru: "If this were a negotiating table, I would have tried to hustle you a little, but it's not a merchant and a duck sitting here, it's just me and you, right? But, if that's how you see things, I'll go change my equipment and my attitude..."

Otto: "After having just praised me for my aptitude as a merchant, you go and say something like that? That idiom about how your tongue hasn't even dried before changing your words applies perfectly here! What is it with you?"

With a bothered-looking expression, Otto sighed, and all signs of the suspenseful and guarded attitude of moments ago disappeared from his face. He took a quick glance at Subaru, who was trying to look indifferent, and said,

Otto: "I don't know why I'm saying this here but, Natsuki-san, I have a goal too... It's not something so grand that I could brag about to other people, but it is a dream nonetheless."

Subaru: "I think a man's dreams can either be so ridiculous that they need to be ludicrously exaggerated, or so ridiculous that they have to be kept inside and never told to anyone, those are the only two kinds there are, I feel, but are you going to tell me yours?"

Otto: “The fact that I agree with you is really unpleasant... Anyway, you see, I was born the second son of a fairly successful merchant family. Ever since I was little, I was brought up in an affluent environment, though when it came time for me to become independent, I didn’t receive much support.”

Subaru didn’t know how many similarities there would be between the sibling situations of this world and the world where he came from, but at least the same basics of passing on titles and inheritance seemed to apply here as well – specifically, that it would be passed on to the eldest son.

In that case, as Subaru had expected of a fantasy-world set in the middle ages, Otto, having been born as the second son, only had a choice of either becoming his elder brother’s assistant, or aiming for independence by himself.

Otto: “While helping my brother manage his business, I learned the fundamentals of the trade, and managed to save up enough money to set out on my own. With that money, I bought Frufoo, my ground dragon, as well as a wagon to go with him, and... Well, I also had the Divine Protection I was born with, so all in all, it went pretty smoothly, I think.”

Subaru: “By Divine Protection, you mean the Divine Protection of the Soul of Language, right? Being able to talk to different kinds of animals, depending on how you use it, I guess you could make quite a crazy profit from it.”

Otto: “But it’s not as useful as you make it sound... There are quite a few inconvenient problems that comes with it that Natsuki-san hadn’t thought of. In any case, it was followed by several years of me plugging away and barely scraping by, but in that time, something of a dream had sprouted inside my mind...”

Continuing with his story after delving into how he became independent, Otto once again brought up the word «dream». Hearing that, for no particular reason, Subaru sat up properly, as if to listen attentively. Receiving this attention, Otto smiled warmly, and started off with “It’s a pretty common dream, you know”,

Otto: “Any merchant who’s been a traveling merchant will have this dream— It’s to own a place of my own, just like having my own castle, to have my own shop... To settle down there and do business there. If I could have this in some big city, it’ll probably be the greatest happiness a merchant can hope for.”

Subaru: “That’s your dream, Otto?”

Otto: “It’s a pretty boring thing to hope for... But after having traveled and traveled, in the end, all I want is just to have the same thing I had when I was growing up. But, well, I guess you could say, that environment had been the symbol of happiness for me.”

Scratching his cheeks in embarrassment, Otto spoke faster and faster to try to cover it up. Subaru took in Otto’s answer, and, wondering whether he would get a favorable reply, he leaned back, and dropped all his weight into his chair.

But, aloof to Subaru’s concern, with a “That’s why”, Otto continued on,

Otto: “A chance to make a big shot like the Margrave indebted to me... As the second son of a trader family, as a traveling merchant, and as a great merchant of future to come, I can’t possibly let such an opportunity pass me by. Especially considering I’d be selling a favor to someone who might become the future Monarch of this country, it’s a business opportunity so huge that even if I redo my entire life I won’t be able to find the likes of it again, isn’t it?”

Subaru: “Ok, so you’ll join us then. Thanks, I’m glad. I knew you’d make the right choice, Otto. Now keep sorting the documents.”

Otto: “What!? That was a pretty good speech just now wasn’t it?? Isn’t that reaction too lacking!?”

Subaru: “I feel like letting it make an impression on me would mean that I lose somehow... Well anyway, the moment you touched these documents that no outsiders are allowed to see, there was already no way out for you. Kekekeke!”

Otto: “No matter how I look at you, you’re still a terrible person!”

At the end of this long conversation, it seemed as though nothing had actually changed, and Otto didn’t receive much compensation for his newfound determination.

But even while teasing Otto like this, deep down, Subaru was thankful for it... Though these words will never come out of his mouth.

Otto: “But I have to say this first, unlike Natsuki-san who supports Emilia-sama unconditionally, I’m only cooperating because of the present circumstances. If the Margrave and Emilia-sama ever fight amongst themselves inside the faction, I’ll need to weigh the gains and losses before choosing a side. So please don’t mistake me for a full-fledged ally.”

Subaru: “If you’re weighing Emilia-tan and Roswaal on a balance scale, you’re completely in my hands. I will slowly and surely feed you all of Emilia-tan’s good qualities, so don’t you worry. —You heard everything loud and clear just now, right?”

Brushing aside Otto’s long-winded excuse, at the end his last sentence, Subaru turned his face and his words toward a completely different direction. Seeing Subaru do this, Otto, stunned with a dumbfounded expression on his face, turned his gaze to where Subaru was looking. And there,

???: “Yep... I mean, Yes. I heard it properly, Subaru-sama.”

With a lovely smile, the girl in maid’s uniform swung her chestnut-colored hair, standing there at the door.

Of the changes that took place in the Mansion during these two days, this was the second.

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With only Frederica, managing everything at the mansion alone was physically impossible, as Subaru was also helping, but his ability as a servant was half-assed at best, and his health still hasn’t fully recovered yet.

So, Frederica, understanding this, went down to the village personally to recruit some help, and that’s where this girl jumped in with open arms — Petra Leyte.

Being a resident of Arlam Village, and being among those who evacuated to the Capital, she had safely returned with them. But since most of the other villagers had not yet returned, it must have been an unsettling time for her. But still, when Frederica came to recruit a new maid for the mansion, she instantly jumped in. And as there were no other candidates who were interested, she was picked up, and was now working in the mansion in temporary employment.

Subaru: “You are still so small, but you’re leaving your parents and coming here to work as a maid, you’re amazing, Petra.”

Petra: “I’m already twelve, so I’m an adult who can work now... Actually, I am just an adult. Subaru-sama could you treat me like one please?”

Subaru: “I will consider it, if you say it politely, after you get the «temporary» part removed from your «temporary employment» and after you get an official certificate from Frederica. Until then, I’ll always treat you like a cute little girl-.”

When he patted her head clumsily as she squirmed around, the girl, with her neatly arranged hair all messed up, let out a quiet “Eeek—”, and clung onto him tightly. It was a completely different reaction than what he expected, but it was certainly a lot better than being abused and spat on.

In any case, she was at an age where she wants to be older than she is and stand up on tiptoes. Petra, with her surprisingly strong character, and her own way of growing up, her aptitude for being a maid was really quite high. Although she didn’t meet all the points, in cleaning up the Mansion and preparing food with Frederica’s support, she has already surpassed Subaru in ability.

...Well, Subaru is really useless.

So, from outside the door of the master’s office, she had been straining her ears to listen in on the conversation inside. She was, of course, acting on Subaru’s instructions, and needless to say, it was all part of his scheme to lure out Otto’s commitment and cut off his escape. Noticing all this, Otto’s face turning red, he glared at Subaru,

Otto: “It was a s-set-up——!?”

Subaru: “It’s nothing to be concerned about. With a third person involved, your statements earlier are now legitimate official record. It was an emotional, heartrending manipulation in order to secure witness testimony for the jury later... So think of it like that.”

Otto: “What is so emotionally heartrending about a man talking about «manipulation»!?”

Hugging his own head, Otto, finally understanding there was now nowhere to run, shouted at them in a half-crying state, but it was too late. Giving Otto a grin, Subaru held up his thumb to Petra, who was standing at the door.

Subaru: “Good job, Petra! But won’t you get scolded by Frederica, using time on something like this?”

Petra: “Right now, I’m spending my time sweeping the corridor. Using even more time to sweep the corridor in front of the the Margrave’s office, I wouldn’t be scolded.”

Subaru: “You’re very shrewd-. Even a small girl is a woman, after all...”

Listening only to the second half of Subaru deeply emotive words, Petra cheerfully loosened her cheeks. Seeing her predictably unchanging reactions and attitudes, it was true that there was something in there that warmed Subaru’s heart.

Petra, like Otto, is another ally who is not under the influence of Roswaal. Compared to Otto, there was not much she could do for Emilia, and her significance and influence is probably even less than Subaru’s. But she is not afraid of Emilia. On the road to the Capital City during their evacuation, she wholeheartedly remained at Emilia side. Subaru would not forget that, and, probably, Emilia would never forget either.

Her being there, perhaps there will be a time when Emilia will be saved by that existence.

Subaru: “It never hurts to have more allies. What you can do isn’t a problem... What is important is what you are willing to do, and what you will strive to able to do for that person. After all, if I am counting the number of things I can do, it’ll look really bad for me...”

His merits and his deficiencies, Subaru could probably count with his fingers and figure out that he had more deficiencies. But even so, he wants to be her ally, and so he must use the few things he does have to their full potential, and keep on going, one way or another.

With a to-hell-with-it attitude, with nothing to stop him, embracing this over-optimistic explanation,

Subaru: “We are definitely small, but let’s do our best from now on. This is what we are, the very first members of the Emilia Faction!”

Making a fist and punching it out into the air, Subaru made his declaration. Seeing that, Petra and Otto, having been left out, looked at each other's faces, and—

Otto: "I never said that I'm a part of that faction, right? Please don't misunderstand, okay?"

Petra: "I want to be an ally of big sister too, but I don't want to lose to her in what's important..."

Otto looked appalled, holding his head. Petra, joining her hands behind her back, looked down and muttered hesitatingly. But still, in the end, they succeeded in matching up their fist bumps, so that there could be no doubt remaining in any bystander's mind that they totally knew what they were doing.

—The two days before setting out toward the Sanctuary, even though it was only a tiny step forward, there was something real in all of that, and, thinking this, the wait had already come to an end.

Arc 4 Chapter 6 - Along the Road to the Sanctuary

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 10, Chapter 2 “The Road to the Sanctuary”, Parts 1-3 and 7

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 1.5](#), [Part 2](#)

Frederica: “I will not be able to accompany you, so please take care during your journey. Also, if you would, please tell the Master that Frederica is watching over the estate.”

It was the morning of departure, and the dragon carriage was parked outside the front of the mansion. Coming to see them off, with these words, Frederica bent the small of her back in a bow. Her form in her bow was so beautifully refined, that anyone receiving it would be intimidated into naturally straightening their backs.

In any case, receiving this, Subaru and Emilia met each other’s gaze.

Emilia: “I am the one who should be sorry, I know how hectic things are right now... Roswaal is absent, and I really should be the one acting in his stead, yet...”

Subaru: “Anyway, Emilia and I are clueless when it comes to caring for the mansion. Even if I can handle routine tasks, everyone could see how much of an amateur I am when numbers are involved. I tried throwing Otto into all that to sort it out, but it’s like sprinkling water on hot coals.”

Looking at the results over the past two days, Subaru could only smile wryly at how futile their efforts had been.

He and Otto wandered aimlessly through the cluttered office, and the only thing they learned was that it was impossible without any explanation from the one responsible... That one statement pretty much summed up the extent of their progress.

Frederica seemed to have a rough idea, but it would take time to cover the discrepancy after her months of absence. Actually, thinking of how much work was involved in just maintaining the mansion, it wouldn't have been right to increase her workload even further.

Emilia had attentively taken care of some of the simple tasks, but aside from that, she had no choice but to plug her ears to the rest of it, even though she knew they would start piling up.

Subaru: "It's like that feeling when you put off doing your summer holiday's homework, and then the next thing you know, it's the first day of the new semester. But I was never the kind of guy who doesn't hand in his homework, though."

Emilia: "I don't really understand, but isn't that a good thing? Right now, I feel the complete opposite, and my chest reeeally hurts. It's not that I feel guilty, but I know it's not good to leave everything neglected like this."

Subaru: "It's not actually our fault, that's how I would rationalize it, but it's hard for Emilia-tan, isn't it? Well, I totally understand how unpleasant it feels to just watch things go from bad to worse..."

It was vexing, to have to neglect things that really shouldn't be put off. But while he could sympathize with Emilia's sense of guilt, it was also true that there was not much he could do to help. In the end, he was insufficient, so the only thing to do is to call someone more competent.

Otto: "The ground dragons are all ready to go. Even though it's only been a few days since they exerted themselves, Natsuki-san's Patrasche looks like she's chafing at the bit to get going."

Subaru: "She's a good hard-working girl, isn't she? Her previous owner must have had an impressive character, unlike her current one... You think she can guide us there? It'd be horrible to get lost on the way and end up stranded."

The one who broke into their conversation was the man sitting in the driver's platform of the dragon carriage, conversing with the two ground dragons, Patrasche and Frufoo — Otto.

Since the Divine Protection of the Soul of Language only applied to Otto, to a bystander, he just looked like he had a screw loose in his head while he was talking to the ground dragons, but Subaru didn't remark on it. Not noticing that Subaru was sending him a heart-warming look, Otto only responded to his question with a straightforward "Uh-huh", nodding.

Otto: “Frederica’s directions were good, and there doesn’t seem to be any problems. I’m sure we can make the trip in under half a day.”

Subaru: “I see, I see... But, were you really planning on coming too?”

Otto: “Of course I am coming!!”

After Otto’s gave his seal of approval on Patrasche’s directions, Subaru nodded and moved on to his next question, to which Otto stomped noisily on the wooden platform, bulging his eyes.

Otto: “After all, this will be my first meeting with the Margrave. Sure, I was the one who asked you to introduce me, but imagining the kind of introduction you’d give if I wasn’t there... It’s too frightening, I can’t just leave it to you!”

Subaru: “Oy oy, I’ll get all flustered if you keep trusting me so much.”

Otto: “Yeah, though we’ve only known each other for a short while, I already trust you 120%— I can be certain that Natsuki-san will always do exactly what I don’t want you to do!”

Subaru twisted his lips at these words, and Emilia, who had been listening silently up to now, let out a sudden burst of laughter. The two men turned to the source of the laughter at the same time, and Emilia timidly raised up her hand,

Emilia: “Really, you two are such good friends. Whenever I see you together, you’re always bickering so affectionately, it makes me kinda jealous.”

Subaru: “If you want, I’ll be affectionate toward Emilia-tan too, only I’ll be flirting instead of bickering. I’ll move Emilia-tan’s bickering time to Otto’s timeslot, and replace it with the affectionate time from Otto’s timeslot.”

Otto: “If you do that, there won’t be anything between us except insults and fist fights!?”

Subaru was pretty confident in his skill with words and insults, but if it comes to fighting Otto in a melee, he’s not entirely sure he could come out on top. Otto looks pretty normal, but Subaru knew personally how strong he was. In a previous loop, after a harsh exchange, Otto had thrown him off a carriage.

Knowing that his opponent wasn't just a pushover, Subaru figured his chances were pretty slim if they ever ended up head-to-head.

Subaru: "Thinking about it like that, my combat abilities are crazy low. I knew that already, but it's still depressing."

Like previously mentioned, Subaru would lose to Otto, and it goes without saying that he couldn't beat Emilia, who knows magic. He had already been demolished by Frederica, and there was no need to mention the sleeping Rem or the shut-in Beatrice. In that case, the only one Subaru had a chance against in the mansion was—

Subaru: "Come to think of it, the only one I've got a chance of beating is Petra, and I don't see her around. What gives?"

Emilia: "I'm scared to ask... But how did your train of thought shift to who you can beat? Anyway, Petra has been in the mansion... Oh, here she comes."

A bit astounded by Subaru's futile efforts to gain victory by process of elimination, Emilia looked toward the mansion, her purple eyes faintly flickering. Being affected, and looking toward the same direction, he saw the form of a girl swinging her sleeves in her brand-new maid's uniform as she ran up to where they stood.

Petra: "Wait, wait a minute. Suba-, Subaru-sama...!"

Subaru: "You don't need to rush, I wouldn't do something so heartless as leaving all of a sudden, only Otto would do something like that. Right, Otto?"

Otto: "Don't you remember what you just said three seconds ago!?"

Smiling at the out-of-breath girl, who was resting her hands on her knees, Subaru pulled Otto into the conversation with some light-hearted teasing as he waited for the girl to catch her breath. Then, wiping her brow softly, Petra looked up.

Her flushed cheeks and her big, round eyes looked adorable. She let out a long breath, releasing her fatigue, and shifted her angelic face into a smile.

Petra: “I wanted to give you this before you leave. Please take it with you.”

With that, she held out her hand, revealing a simple handkerchief that seemed nothing out of the ordinary. The edges of the white cloth were laced with a golden-color, and the tips of his fingers told him it was made with meticulous workmanship. Receiving it, he turned it over to look at the other side.

Subaru: “It’s... embroidered. Oh, it’s really good.”

Sewn into the surface of the white cloth, was an embroidery that was most likely hand-stitched by Petra herself. It was done with grey, pink and black colored threads, and the design was something Subaru was very well acquainted with. Just then, Emilia, who had been peeking over his shoulder, let out a small laugh “Aha”.

Emilia: “It’s the same Puck you drew, Subaru. Oh wow, it’s really well done.”

Subaru: “My disfigured Puck, yeah this is really well done. There mustn’t have been much time to study it either.”

Petra: “I got the stamps after doing the Radio Calisthenics every morning.”

Forgetting to speak politely, Petra pulled something out from around her neck. It was the stamp card Subaru had made and given out to the village children. —Every morning when they participated in the radio calisthenics, he had stamped their cards with an image he’d engraved onto a sweet potato, in place of a real stamp. She held in her hand the most recent stamp, the disfigured Puck’s Gloomy Monday. She must have worked hard, pricking her fingers as she sewed in the design.

Subaru: “It really is well done. As a Sewing Master, I can’t afford to lose here.”

Petra: “Will you take it... Ah, no. Would you please take it?”

Subaru: “It’s actually, «Would you please accept this». —Of course, I’ll gladly accept it. It seems a shame to use it for wiping blood, sweat or tears, so I’ll just keep it close as a good luck charm.”

Carefully folding the handkerchief, Subaru tenderly, and with great care, put it into his chest pocket before looking back towards Petra. Then, as gently as he could — he looked to the vicious, narrowed eyes

and the sharpened fangs filling up the diabolical smile that was currently pointed at Petra. Hearing his words, Petra placed both her hands on her blushing face and looked away.

Petra: “I shall await your safe return. Oh, and big sister and the noisy guy too.”

Emila: “It kinda seems like I’m just an extra...”

Otto: “Wait, wasn’t my assessment a little too harsh!?”

Emilia and Otto responded to Petra’s words in turn, a wry smile making its way onto their faces. Subaru couldn’t help but find himself smiling, as Petra seemed to think nothing of the dense pressure emanating from Frederica behind her. He had no doubt that the moment they leave, Petra will be set upon Frederica’s harsh education. Petra, live strong!

Subaru: “Well then, while it’s hard to leave you all, we should be on our way.”

Emilia: “If we spend too much time talking here, it’d have been meaningless to try to leave so early.”

Subaru interjected, putting an end to the vibrant conversation, before hopping up into the cargo space of the dragon carriage. After that, he held out his hand,

Subaru: “If you would, Emilia-tan. Into my arms.”

Emilia: “I’m sure it would be pleasant to see the scenery from the driver’s platform once in awhile?”

Subaru: “Ahh, heartless! EMK²³— Oh, wah!”

Being treated so cruelly, Subaru was almost about to withdraw his hand, when it was pulled so forcefully that he nearly fell out of the carriage as Emilia passed casually beside him. Her silver hair brushed against his nose as she went by, until she landed inside the dragon carriage with a tiny sound. Softly sitting down across from Subaru, she tilted her head looking at him,

Emilia: “Something wrong?”

²³ Emilia-tan Maji Koakuma (エミリアたん・マジ・小悪魔), translated as “Emilia is seriously a little devil”.

Subaru: “Nope—, nothing—?”

With these words, Subaru loudly stomped his way over to where she was, and plunked himself down beside her. Considering the inside of the carriage was very spacious, Emilia smiled at Subaru’s cramped use of it.

Otto, watching their exchange, grumbled “I can’t stand being associated with you” as he sat down in the driver’s seat, gripping the reins and looking up at the road ahead.

Otto: “Alright then, we’re off. Take care not to bite your tongues please.”

Subaru: “Right back at you, don’t shake the carriage too much. And if you’re going to suddenly apply the brakes— please use the signal we talked about before. Without that, it’ll be hard for me to time when to push Emilia-tan down.”

Emilia: “You’re thinking of something like that?”

Otto: “!! I never heard that devilish plot in my life! Wait, when did I get turned into an accomplice!?”

Emilia turned a gaze of near disdain upon both Subaru and Otto, and didn’t seem to acknowledge Otto’s outcry at the false accusation. Thinking Otto’s wailing at the injustice of it all suited himself well, as though that had nothing to do with him, Subaru lifted up his hand,

Subaru: “Alright. Destination Sanctuary. Let’s be off—!”

Otto: “Who are you to say that!?”

Seeing Otto sulking in the driver’s seat, Subaru replied “You aren’t good at getting hyped, are you” complainingly, before sticking his head out the window to look at the two who were here see to them off,

Subaru: “Okay now, we’re leaving the place in your care. Also... I’m counting on you... to take good care of Rem.”

Frederica: “Please, leave it to me. In return, I leave Emilia-sama and the Master in your hands.”

Petra: “Take care, and come back safe.”

Subaru's voice held none of its usual playfulness, and as they prepared to depart, Frederica and Petra bowed in farewell. After that stupidly formal exchange, this time, Subaru decisively—

—Well, unfortunately, not without some hesitation, severed his thoughts from the mansion.

Subaru: “Oy, we haven’t left yet Otto? You’re sloooooow~”

Otto: “I can’t understand this treatment!!”

This exchange blowing away the rest of the tension, they set off for the Sanctuary.

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Frederica: “It seems I’m going to have to teach you to speak more politely, and bow properly again.”

Petra: “I’m so sorry. It’s just... I wanted to be cosseted, if only a little.”

Petra quickly lowered her head, her gesture nearly perfectly imitating Frederica’s teaching. She was a fast learner, and could take things in quickly, and was certainly a student worth teaching. The exchange from a moment ago was understandable given her age, so there was no reason to scold her over such a minor thing.

Frederica: “I know that you have been close with Subaru-sama and Emilia-sama these past few days. Still, it is not good to forget that your relationship is that of servant and employer.”

Petra: “—Yes ma’am. I am deeply sorry.”

The girl was conscious of the fact that her behavior had been selfish.

She could have behaved exactly as she had been taught, and seen off Subaru and the rest properly, but she had instead intentionally separated herself from her duties as a servant, and chose to see Subaru and the others off as just a simple girl... There must have been a reason for it, and perhaps the reason was small, but it was one she was unable to part with.

Frederica: “There is no propriety in discussing this further. Instead, as penance for what you did, you will be hand-copying extra texts this afternoon.”

Petra: “Uuhh... Will the number of topics increase?”

Frederica: “You should have been prepared for at least that much. Then again, if you had already calculated this would be your punishment to make up for your actions, then I am quite looking forward to your future as my student.”

Saying that, Frederica clapped her hands with a “Now then”, continuing,

Frederica: “Even if Emilia-sama and the rest are out for now, Beatrice-sama is still in the mansion. We can’t afford to become lax with meals and cleaning. If we don’t finish quickly, there won’t be enough time for studies. So Petra, hurry up and finish your tasks.”

Petra: “Yes, ma’am. I’ll go finish them in no time!”

Watching the young girl run off, her clothes flapping, Frederica’s mouth softened ever so slightly, revealing her fangs. With a practiced motion, she covered the smile with her hand, and looked towards the direction where the no longer visible dragon carriage had gone — Towards Emilia and the rest who had departed from the mansion.

Frederica: “It is as you said it would be, Master. Whether they can overcome the Sanctuary or not, is up to Emilia-sama and Subaru-sama now.”

Closing her eyes, she let the gentle wind wash over her.

Frederica: “Will Emilia-sama be able to overcome it? Bound with the Witch’s blood, that inescapable impasse that is the garden of paradise——”

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Subaru: “So, Puck hasn’t shown his face yet, after all?”

Emilia: “No, he hasn’t. I do call out to him, and I still feel his existence inside the crystal but... this is the first time he has gone missing for this long, so I’m kind of worried.”

In the smoothly galloping dragon carriage, sitting together, only Subaru and Emilia’s voices resounded in the car.

Under the Divine Protection of Wind Evasion, the sound of the wind and all the noises outside were almost completely cut off from the dragon carriage. Even while running with such great speed, the near absence of turbulence or sound all made it feel like being in something of a dream. Perhaps, this was the same luxurious feeling that might be felt while riding in the premium seats of the Shinkansen Bullet Trains, but Subaru never had a chance to experience those seats, and not even the normal seats, for that matter.

Anyway, in the quiet interior of the carriage, the words exchanged between them can be heard crisp and clear. And here, the topic of their conversation drifted to the change that had been bothering them for the past few days – Namely, the absence of the one that was usually by Emilia’s side, that father-figure cat who was always thwarting Subaru’s advances on Emilia... Puck.

Subaru: “Now that I think about it, he had not shown up since before we returned to the mansion... The last time we saw him was...”

Emilia: “For me was it in the Capital City, when we were in Crusch-sama’s Mansion. I thought everything was very normal, but I couldn’t meet him again after that morning. Even when I call him, he doesn’t show up... I was worried if I had made him angry or something.”

Looking down, Emilia played with the tips of her hair, trying not to show her face to Subaru. These few days, her silver hair had been fixed in a braid.

Seeing Subaru stare at her, as if understanding the intention behind his gaze, she nodded “Yes”,

Emilia: “The final contract I made with Puck the last time I saw him was «Keeping my hair in a braid». After that, I had not been told what to do, so I kept it as it is.”

Subaru: “Your hairstyle is your contract with Puck? Really? That’s really light... isn’t it? Although, it’s said that hair is the life of a woman, so that’s as if Puck’s contract is holding a life...”

Emilia: “I think that is a really light price to pay. I didn’t know this until I got out of the forest, but for getting into contract with a spirit like Puck, conditions like this one are way too light. Roswaal was also very surprised. In reality, you apparently need to have humongous amounts of Mana or complicated terms.”

Seeing Emilia loosening the corners of her lips as she said this, Subaru nodded as if thinking of something. But then, he quickly lifted up his jaw to shake Emilia off of her weakened smile,

Subaru: “Well, for restricting even a little bit of Emilia-tan’s time, for me, I would say that is a really heavy price.”

Emilia: “Lines like that, if you keep saying it so lightly it would become superficial. If it was something important then it would be better to keep them for important timings, I think.”

Emilia voiced her objections at how Subaru was finding more and more ways to flirt. On the other end, Subaru slightly raised both his hands and shook his head,

Subaru: “The secret lines reserved to tell Emilia-tan in important scenes are kept separately. This one was for daily life, one of the many lighter things to say to Emilia-tan.”

Emilia: “Really, Subaru, you have a silver tongue... Oh no, maybe my face is red so don’t look!”

Seeing Emilia suddenly hold up her palms to cover her face, Subaru laughed, confirming he got what he wanted. And, trying to bring the conversation back on topic, he continued with “Well...”

Subaru: “Since Puck is absent, there are some serious concerns in the combat aspect of this trip. We can’t rely on Otto for fighting, and I’m obviously no good at all. And, Emilia-tan is also not as tough without Puck, right?”

Emilia: “Oh, you say things like that, huh. But I’ll have you know, I can still use magic when Puck’s not here. It’s not just Puck, I have contracts with Micro Spirits too. I have no problem communicating with them, so I can fight. I will protect you no matter what happens.”

Subaru: “Oh no, so manly... That’ll mean I’m way too pathetic, aren’t I... Those words, I myself will eventually say them to Emilia-tan one day, so please wait.”

Emilia: “I’ll be waiting without any expectations.”

As if proving Emilia’s words, coming nearer, and gathering closer onto Emilia’s fingertips, the Micro Spirits appeared drifting, shining. While they looked like Julius’ Quasi Spirits, their existences seemed weaker in comparison — and though their power was a world away from Puck’s, at least, they certainly didn’t appear to be a collection of defenseless beings.

The only girl in the group, and the one he has a crush on, no less... having to rely on her for protection would really be embarrassing...

Subaru: “That said, my reliance on other people hasn’t changed much since the battle with the White Whale. I was completely dependent on Rem then, and even before that... wait, was there never a time when I worked everything out on my own!?”

Of course, that was the story from his perspective, and it might have been too much of an undervaluation. But in any case, since there was no one with enough information to find fault with this conclusion, Subaru’s horrified reaction upon realizing all this was just passed off.

Subaru: “Well, Sanctuary, huh. Actually, what kind of a place could it be...”

After a bit of self-reflection, he gazed out at the scenery outside through a little window, muttering this under his breath.

Right now, to Subaru, the Sanctuary was a place of absolute unknown. The sound of the name itself did not give off a very dangerous impression, but Frederica’s warnings as she spoke of the Sanctuary weighed heavily his mind. Out of those words,

Subaru: “«Beware of Garfiel», huh—”

Emilia: “You hadn’t met him yet either, right, Subaru? I have only heard the name too, and Frederica didn’t tell me in detail either.”

As if following Subaru’s mutterings, Emilia’s neat eyebrows narrowed anxiously as well. The scene that emerged in her mind, was probably the same as the one in Subaru’s. The scene of Frederica’s warning, to be wary of the man named Garfiel, but refusing to say any more.

Even when Subaru voiced his dissatisfaction at the tiny amount of information he had been given, she only stubbornly rejected, saying “It is because of my Oath”, and would not say another word. Emilia and Subaru, not knowing what to do, did not push her further.

Subaru: “I really should’ve gotten more out of her... Knowing full well he’s a dangerous character, she’s sending us there with only a name, it’s just too much.”

Emilia: “It can’t be helped, it’s an Oath. Agreements are holy and inviolable, never to be breached. Contracts and Oaths and Covenants, though they vary in gravity, must all be kept equally.”

Swinging her raised finger, Emilia recited this to Subaru as if instructing him. Contracts and Oaths and Covenants, like a word-game they flew into his ears, and the question suddenly coming into his mind, he let it slip from his lips,

Subaru: “So, between Emilia-tan and Puck is a Contract. Between Frederica and Roswaal, is an Oath out of moral obligation. And then, the agreement exchanged between the Dragon and the Kingdom, is a Covenant... Am I right? Or did I get something wrong?”

Emilia: “It isn’t separated out so distinctly, but as I understand it, Contracts are between individuals, Oaths are made when one party makes a verbal promise to another, and Covenants are agreements that transcend individuals, and transcend even time... That’s how I was taught, at least.”

Subaru: “I see. It does fit that understanding of it...”

Nodding to Emilia’s explanation, Subaru proceeded to violently scratch his head, and continued with “But still”,

Subaru: “It’s adorned with such lofty words, though... Agreements are holy and inviolable, right?”

Emilia: “Agreements... Promises are important things. Of course, Oaths, and even Contracts have no force to protect them. It isn’t there, but still, we keep promises. We work hard to keep them, right? Even if no one is watching, or no one realizes it, promises are kept. Whether it’s the other person or I, we would do our best to keep it.”

Holding her hands to her chest, Emilia locked her gaze on Subaru, who had asked the question so lightly. The tone of her voice was gentle, and there was no sense of blaming him... But his heart hurt all the more because of it.

Emilia: “Because we believe this, we give our word, and work hard to fulfill them. Because promises are kept to protect the trust between one another, right?”

Subaru: “About that... I am really sorry—!”

In the interior of the carriage, without the slightest hint of turbulence, Subaru fell onto the floor and dropped his head straight in front of him. Seeing him rubbing his forehead on the floor in a full *dogeza*²⁴, for a moment, Emilia flapped her eyelids in astonishment, then a few seconds later, reflecting on what she just said combined with Subaru’s current movements, she seemed to understand.

Emilia: “Oh, I wasn’t blaming you or anything. Well it is true that you didn’t keep your promise, and then didn’t even apologize, and instead turned on me, so it’s true that I had gone like «What’s this!»...”

Subaru: “Ow ow ow my ears hurt!”

Emilia: “But then, after thinking about it, I realized I was being unfair and was only seeing my side of things. I should have gone to reconcile with Subaru right after, but I was so obstinate, that I didn’t, so it was also my fault. Really, sorry.”

Subaru: “Ow ow ow my chest hurts!”

Emilia: “Agreements and things like that, maybe they are deeper and heavier for me... because I am a Spiritual Arts user, contracts are more vital to me than to normal people. Spiritual Arts users must honor our contracts with Spirits above all else, and that’s why I’m over-sensitive when it comes to this... Yeah, so promises are a reeeaaally big deal for me. Now that I think about it, Subaru, reflect on what you did.”

Subaru: “Ow ow ow my heart hurts!”

²⁴ Prostrating himself with his head to the floor (for more information, see [here](#)).

While she was blurting all this out, as if remembering everything Subaru put her through, Emilia started to pout. Sensing this, Subaru pressed his head down even harder. It was clear now, why she was so infuriated with him in the Royal Palace.

It was not just anger due to a broken promise. For her, the promise in itself meant something far more, and far heavier. When Subaru had broken it so lightly, even a soft-hearted person such as herself could not stay calm.

Because, without realizing, Subaru had trampled on something very important in Emilia's heart.

Emilia: "Did you, reflect on your actions now?"

Subaru: "I repent. Deeper than the oceans, higher than the mountains, wider than the skies, and more expansive than the cosmos."

Emilia: "Alright, I forgive you."

Softly poking Subaru in the forehead as he looked up, Emilia then touched her finger to her lips, smiling lightly. Relieved that there was no hint of anger from her, and also because her next movement was so adorable, Subaru found himself unable to connect his words. Not paying any mind to the way Subaru was moving his mouth like a breathing fish, Emilia turned to look to the road ahead, and,

Emilia: "The Sanctuary, and Garfiel. And Roswaal, and everyone from the village... There are so many people to talk to, right now my heart is already pounding."

Subaru: "Don't worry, I would never let Emilia-tan be put in any danger. Please trust your second shield, myself."

Emilia: "You're the second? Then, who's the first?"

Subaru: "Right now, he's driving the dragon carriage and flirting with my Patrasche."

Looking at Subaru, who had just named Otto as a meat shield without his consent, this time, Emilia couldn't hold it in and burst out laughing. Watching her breaking out in laughter, Subaru was content, and in his mind, he wondered how many obstacles will be waiting for them in their road ahead.

Ever since he came to this world, he had been presented with one problem after another without a moment's rest.

Even along the road to the Sanctuary, worries and expectations of what lies in store in that unknown land were brewing within his heart. Anyhow, Frederica herself had instigated it, and Roswaal and the fact that the other villagers had not returned only added to his doubts, and there was Subaru's own inability to get Puck to come out, and... what he left in the mansion... worried him to no end.

Emilia: "Were you, thinking about Rem-san?"

Subaru: "...You can tell?"

Subaru had suddenly fell silent. Gazing at the side of his face, Emilia tilted her head. Her silver hair slid off of her shoulder as she did so, and lifting the tip her braid with her fingers and swinging it side to side, she said, "I can", and,

Emilia: "Just like the way you always look at me, I'd think about Subaru the same way, too."

Subaru: "So that means, Emilia-tan, you are thinking about me all the time?"

Emilia: "Oh, actually take it as half of half of half of that."

Subaru: "That means three hours...!"

Emilia: "Half of half of half of..."

Subaru: "I'll get hurt if I hear the exact number, so no more!"

Calling out to stop Emilia, who had been trying to calculate the exact realistic number, Subaru dropped a small sigh and scratched his cheek, and,

Subaru: "I've entrusted her to Frederica and Petra, so there is no need to worry. There shouldn't be... But still, this anxiety that shouldn't be welling up in me, I can't explain it in words."

Emilia: "You worry because you are worried, it can't be helped. It just means that's how important she is to you. To be thought about like that, I'm actually a little bit jealous."

Subaru: “Let me say this right now, I feel just as strongly about Emilia-tan... wait, you just tricked me into saying that, right?”

Emilia: “Yes, I was being mean. Sorry.”

Sticking out her tongue, through that one act she forgave it all. In front of Subaru, who couldn’t help but make gargle sounds with his throat, Emilia said “But...” looking up at him,

Emilia: “The one you’re even more worried about is Beatrice, right?”

Subaru: “...Unless, Emilia-tan, are our hearts connected to each other? The perfect *owari*²⁵ is already in sight!”

Emilia: “Usually you would go «There’s no way I’m worried» even though you are, but today, you didn’t even say that. It must mean you are really worried.”

Being hit right on the mark, Subaru almost let out a “Guu”, and bit his lips with a vexed expression on his face. But he quickly snapped out of it, and,

Subaru: “Worried? I’m not worried or anything. It’s just, breaking off with a fight like that, I couldn’t meet with her again afterwards. So, leaving the mansion without seeing her again left me with a bit of a bad feeling, that’s all. Yeah, just a little bit. Just that tiny bit, just the tip.”

Emilia: “That sounded a bit dirty to me, maybe I’m thinking too much into it...”

Subaru: “You’re not imagining it, that was just me.”

Hiding his happiness at getting the reaction he was aiming for, Subaru looked at Emilia, who tilted her head, still smiling slightly as if not understanding a thing, and,

Subaru: “If Beako’s shut-in problem gets worse, being originally a shut-in myself, I’d feel some kind of responsibility...”

Emilia: “Shut-in... Subaru, you know a lot about that right? Beatrice, is she coming out?”

²⁵ Engrish flip. Means “ending” (終わり), originally “エンディング” (ending).

Subaru: “It’d be really hard, actually. Without finding a good opportunity, just pulling her out forcefully isn’t good, but then taking too much time would be indulging her too much. Those shut-ins are such a pain in the ass to... Wait! I was one myself!”

After that stupid ending, he tried to correct the direction of the conversation again. After all, since they were heading to the Sanctuary right now, it wouldn’t be something they’ll deal with until their return.

Subaru: “After I get back, I’ll have to talk over a lot of things with Beako. Last time, I couldn’t get her to tell me any of the things I wanted to know.”

Emilia: “Beatrice and Puck, it feels like they know all sorts of things, and are hiding them from us.”

Subaru: “I get the same feeling. Even with Frederica, but then, everyone associated with that Mansion has a habit of saying something suggestive and then leaving the answers out for later. It’s like a disease already. Not the good kind of disease, either. And that Beako, returning the Gospel like that, saying things that I still can’t get out of my mind...”

The Gospel, which Beatrice had thrown back at him along with her mystifying words, is currently safely in Subaru’s keeping. If it was just going to be a nuisance, he could have left it behind, but in the worst case, he could interrogate Roswaal about it, so he brought it along with him. But because it was so creepy, he kept it at the very bottom of his bag, as if quietly hiding it from sight.

Emilia: “—I think we’ve entered the forest.”

Emilia, suddenly lifting her face, and brushing away the hair from her forehead, said this as she looked all around. Following her, Subaru also raised his head, but from inside the carriage he could not see it right away. Stepping toward the window and peeking out, it’s true that the colors outside had become deepened with green.

Subaru: “You didn’t even look outside but you could tell, huh.”

Emilia: “Even though it’s mixed, it’s because I have Elven blood in me. They say that Elves are the race of the forest, and so the Elves and the Forests have an inseparable bond—”

Then, just as Emilia said this with a fleeting smile, a sudden, subtle sensation shocked Subaru’s skin, and he looked around to see what it was. But of course, the impact that surged through the surroundings,

was not something his eyes could see. Inside the carriage, the Divine Protection of Wind Evasion still separated out the rest of the world. But,

Subaru: “—!? Hey, hey!”

Emilia: “——”

Emilia’s slender body was swaying powerlessly, and just like that, began to fall, and Subaru, sliding in, managed to catch her just in time. Her momentum stopped by his embrace, lying feebly in his arms, Emilia’s eyes were closed, on her face was a pained expression as she lay faintly panting.

Subaru: “Wait, Emilia-tan!? What happened, Emilia!?”

Emilia couldn’t seem to reply. She looked as if she was in pain, but other than her shallow, accelerated breathing and her excruciating expression, there was no sign of fever or even sweating. Lifting her up lightly in his arms, Subaru immediately realized he could not deal with this by himself. So, rushing to the front, he stuck his head through the small window connecting to the driver’s platform, and—

Subaru: “Otto! Something’s wrong, Emilia suddenly collapsed! Do you have any medicine or...”

Otto: “Oh— Natsuki-san, sorry...”

Subaru’s impatient words trailed off. Otto, at whom he had thrown these words, had sweat forming on his forehead. Turning to Subaru, he replied with a voice that seemed to have lost all strength.

Subaru noticed two things——

The first, was that the carriage had stopped. Patrasche and Frufoo had halted their steps, and were standing still between the trees. So overwhelming was his emotion in the previous moments that he had not even realized that the carriage had stopped, but now, there was another, even more serious problem. That was the second thing he noticed,

???: “Just waltz’n in straight from th’front, y’got some nerve, stranger.”

As if spitting out the words, unlike the literal content of what he was saying, there was not the slightest hint of friendliness in the way he said it. With only this one sentence, one could almost grasp the

character of the person who spoke those words. True to that impression, the man flaunting himself in front of the dragon carriage looked exactly what he sounded like.

With spiky short blonde hair, a white scar prominent on his forehead, the sharp leer of his eyes did not lose to Subaru's in their viciousness, and like that of a feline beast, the canine-teeth in his jaws peered out, exceedingly white. His curling, slouching back made him seem rather short for a man, but the darkly ferocious aura emanating from his entire body removed any inclination to underestimate him for his small stature.

???: "D'know where th'hell y'came from, but y'look like'a «stake goes through with'a brittle point» kind o'guy."

Subaru: "Huh, wha—?"

Hearing a strange idiom he had never heard before, Subaru only let out a confused moan, but his opponent, listening, must have taken it for fear, and with a dismissing laugh "Hah",

???: "Oh? Y'scared eh. But's true y'struck some bad luck. After all, th'place y'tried t'sneak into was'a place, an'what's more, y'ran right into me!"

The man laughed viciously, clacking his fangs as he laughed, and, putting his fists together, he lowered his stance, ready for battle. And in that posture, he looked up with a glare at his silent adversary,

Garfiel: "Meet'n up with Garfiel was th'end of y'luck. Now get wreck'd like'a «Pazo-mazo right an'left»!"

The punk who named himself, cussing incomprehensibly, thumped his foot into the ground.

And the moment after, the overwhelming impact, as if reversing the world, struck Subaru.

Arc 4 Chapter 7 - The Experimental Grounds

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 10, Chapter 2 “The Road to the Sanctuary”, Part 7, and
Volume 10, Chapter 3 “A Long-Awaited Reunion”, Part 1

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken – [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

The moment the punk pressed his foot into the ground, Subaru felt the illusion as if the world had tilted.

Of course, in reality, such a thing could not possibly happen. Even the largest human could not hope to disturb the foundations of the world with a simple stamp of the foot, and the sheer weight of the earth would not budge so easily. So, the tilting of the world can only be Subaru’s illusion.

What had actually happened, was that starting from the point where Garfiel’s placed down his foot, a wave spread out in the ground, and like flipping a piece of tatami, it tossed the dragon carriage into the air as it passed.

Subaru: “Impossible— Uwah!?”

Like on the end of a see-saw, the sensation of upward momentum reached its peak, and then, as if floating, the dragon carriage glided through the air. Along with the ground dragons Patrasche and Frufoo, just about exceeding one ton in weight combined, they were all blown flying. Inside the carriage, Subaru only held Emilia close within in his embrace.

Then, just like that, the dragon carriage slammed onto the ground, the sheer force of the impact sent its entire frame, inside and out, gnashing and creaking against itself. It was a high-quality dragon carriage. Its luxury did not stop at its glamorous appearance, for its quality was evidenced both in terms of comfort and durability, and this was demonstrated perfectly by the fact that it managed to avert total destruction just now. But still, in the half rolled over dragon carriage, there was no way to immediately escape.

In other words, since escape is no longer an option, the only choice remaining is to stand and fight.

Subaru: “Damn it, what was th—”

Shaking his head, which was still hanging out of the window to the coachman’s platform, Subaru held a hand to his aching forehead. He had struck his head on the way down, but fortunately, other than the pain, there was no lesion or bleeding. Suddenly remembering, he looked down, and saw, lying in his arms, Emilia was unharmed. A surge of relief washed over him, but this emotion was soon replaced by the anxiety of being reminded that the culprit who caused this was still outside. Quickly lifting up his head, the dreaded sight that met Subaru’s gaze was—

Subaru: “Patrasche—!!”

Screeching, fangs bared, the enormous jet-black ground dragon leapt toward the scrawny figure.

Making use of the loosened connection to the dragon carriage, with a twist of her body, Patrasche broke free and with rapid movements she set off against the assailant for a counterattack. With pointed fangs as sharp as blades, the power of her jaw can slice through human flesh and crush through bone and still have strength to spare. With speed like the wind, she aimed for Garfiel’s neck, about to tear it to shred without a single question asked.

Garfiel: “Excitin’ choice. Good groun’dragon... No, yer a good girl, aren’t ya. Hell, «the sound o’breaking bones’ a sign o’love» they say.”

Patrasche: “———!”

Lodged in her closing jaws, was the front end of an outstretched arm that should by all accounts have been completely shredded. Garfiel had held out his right arm against Patrasche’s bite. And the ground dragon, zeroing in on the target, chomped down on the wrist, ripping the forearm arm clean off, and then fell upon the torso... or at least, that was what should have happened.

But instead, Patrasche froze in place. Not only her body, but even her jaw clamping on the arm lodged inside stopped moving completely. Was some special ability being used, or was it caused by magic?

This question turned in Subaru's mind, but soon, Garfiel's action answered his doubts. Expanding the muscles of his lodged arm, it completely overpowered the force of Patrasche's jaw, stretching it open wider and wider.

Garfiel: "G'job, you. Got goin' right away, and still not givin' up, even better. Y'passed!"

Patrasche: "———!"

The jet-black ground dragon lowered her body, still clenching with her mouth she twisted her waist. The strength of her jaw sealed on the man's right wrist, she swung her tail whooshing upwards to swipe him flying. Subaru took a blow from her tail once, but, watching Patrasche's movements now, it's immediately obvious how much she had been holding back that time. Literally putting her whole body behind the blow, she directed all her hostility into striking the body that was left completely open. But even so, it was casually stopped in its tracks by Garfiel's left hand.

A dry cracking sound rang out, and after the shock dissipated, all that remained was a hand grabbing onto the end of a tail. His right hand in her jaws, his left hand holding her tail, Garfiel smiled, revealing his beast-like fangs.

Garfiel: "Won't hurt ya. Sleep tight."

Making a wide swing with his arm, like some kind of joke, the circular trajectory of its motion carried Patrasche's massive body gliding through the air. Then, all of a sudden laterally spinning with an inconceivable sensation of weightlessness, Patrasche's eyes filled with confusion as she was gently tossed to the ground. Her massive body barely bounced as it landed, and then silence: Patrasche had been defeated. In front of this scene, Subaru's parched throat let out a groan of disbelief,

Subaru: "H—, he threw Patrasche?"

Garfiel: "Such'a loyal nature. Tossed y'out gently, shouldn't hurt. Let's finish this before ya get up!"

Disregarding the stunned Subaru, Garfiel lifted up his face and hopped onto the coachman's stand. Lying on the slanted coachman's stand was Otto, in a broken-looking posture, and he tried to stand up as the attacker leaped over.

Otto: “Guh... But, don’t underestimate me! I am a traveling merchant you know! I am totally prepared for getting mugged by thugs on the road during my business. So come on, but if you rather not fall victim to the «Suwen-Family-Ryu-Thug-Repulsion-Technique», I suggest you surrender now... Hoowah!”

Garfiel: “Shut up, ham. What d’ya think yer doin with yer weak-ass skills, takin’ me on? Go take’a nap.”

Right after striking a fighting pose, full of spirit, Otto instantly crumbled when Garfiel, suddenly coming up to him, gave him a flick in the forehead.

The flick — Or more accurately, the close-range middle finger strike, with what sounded like tremendous force, sent Otto’s strong body flying off of the coachman’s platform. Holding his forehead in what looked like agony, he passed out without a word. Regardless of whether he was dead or alive, he was no longer an obstacle.

Garfiel: “Now, by th’looks of it, yer the only one left.”

Snorting, the punk turned with a sharp look that could cut a man in half, murmuring.

Standing on the coachman’s platform, the distance between him and Subaru was only about four paces — but considering the way he had instantly closed his distance with Otto, there might as well be no distance between them at all.

Gasping down his breath, Subaru racked his brain but could not think of a single plan to break through. The only fighting force that might have been able to resist this man, Emilia, was still unconscious after her inexplicable collapse. But no matter what happens, he must protect her.

Subaru: “I’m...”

Garfiel: “«Flip it this way or that yer skin’s still blue», I don’t wanna hear it—!”

With the sound of a light tap on the floor, in the blink of an eye, Garfiel’s short figure appeared in front of Subaru’s face. Above, the raised arm had its five fingers spread open, and it was easy to imagine the future where the claws would swing down, ripping his stunned body apart.

And in the face of that future where his limbs would be ripped apart, there was only one thing Subaru could think to do: to prevent the damage from reaching Emilia in his arms, and to protect her with his life.

Garfiel: “———!”

——A few seconds passed, or perhaps it was longer.

His eyes tightly shut, shielding Emilia with his entire body, the time Subaru spent waiting for the shock to come dragged on to the point of confusion. Then, hesitantly opening his eyes, he found the five fingers spread out motionless in front of his face. Behind it, there was a perplexed look in the punk’s eyes. Keeping his gaze on Subaru, who could not help but hold his breath, he twisted his own head from side to side, making loud cracking noises with the bones in his neck.

Garfiel: “Instead of striking back y’prioritized protectin’ the girl, the hell was that. After yer dead she’ll be next anyway. Wasn’t that a terrible decision?”

Being hit with a sound argument that he really didn’t want to hear, Subaru, going through all sorts of reasons, couldn’t come up with a reply. The silence making him even more displeased, Garfiel waved his sharp-clawed hand.

Garfiel: “Well, yer too slow anyway. Make a move or not, there probably wasn’t much hope. You’re all pretty useless either way.”

Subaru: “Y, you are...”

Garfiel: “Hah?”

Remarking on their ineptitude, Garfiel gave out his merciless assessment. And as Subaru was trying to move his frozen throat, attempting to squeeze out a question, Garfiel’s vicious-looking face twisted up with displeasure, and moved in even closer to Subaru’s face.

Garfiel: “You’re whisperin, gotta speak up. C’mon.”

Subaru: “You are Garfiel... Correct? You are acquainted with Roswaal and Frederica?”

Garfiel: “——Frederica?”



Illustration from Volume 10, coloring by u/Y_alruqaishi ([source](#))

Confirming Subaru's word, for the first time, Garfiel's expression lost its aggression. Looking astounded, like a carnivorous beast that had lost the scent of blood, for an instant, he seemed almost cute and tame, but, immediately concealing it again with a bitter expression,

Garfiel: "Why d'ya know that name... No, wait. That woman you're holdin', is the silver-haired... half-devil?"

Subaru: "She's a half-elf. Don't you dare use that name in front of her."

Garfiel: "—Hyah. Whatsthiswhatsthis, y'got some spirit got allofasudden."

Glancing down at Emilia, Subaru suddenly exploded back at the utterance of that derogatory name. The fear of moments before all disappeared in the face of pure rage, and Garfiel, hearing this, clicked his fangs together noisily, full of glee.

Garfiel: "Say, isntshe that rumored Emilia-sama? Now, a half-devil showing up around here could only have everything to do with Roswaal."

Subaru: "Son of a..."

Ignoring Subaru's previous words, Garfiel said "half-devil" again with special emphasis. Hearing this, Subaru stood up, but was immediately stopped by Garfiel's hand.

Garfiel: "«The dumbass who bites on molten iron only gets hurt», right? You don' have a chance against me. Look at the difference in strength eh? —I don't want you to get hurt, y'know?"

Making a fist with his outstretched hand, he cracked his knucklebones as a warning. Their respective strengths are obvious, without knowing his intentions, it's better not to make things any worse by resisting. To press down his anger and wait for another chance to get his revenge, would be the wisest course of action. That's why,

Subaru: "...Eat shit."

Garfiel: "Hah?"

Subaru: "I don't want to get hurt. And you'll beat me up pretty easily I guess. But— I can't stand by while you continue to say things that will make this girl sad."

Gently laying Emilia down on the luggage stand, lightly touching the hair on her forehead, Subaru stood up staring at Garfiel at a distance so close that their foreheads almost touched. A distance within each other's breaths, a distance within each other's reach.

Subaru: "Take back that bullshit name... and never use it again."

Garfiel: "...You want me to do what you say? But you don't got what it takes, do you? Your face, your gut, your shin, you want them all to get wrecked, yeah?"

Subaru: "Go ahead and try. But don't expect me to go down for free, though... If you punch my face I'll bite you, if you strike my gut I'll grab you, if you hit my shin I'll spit on you, and I will be paying you back tooth for tooth."

Responding to intimidation with intimidation, Subaru was carried up by the surge passion burning in his chest. In front of him, the hostile aura quietly emanating from Garfiel sent shivers circling all over his body. Quite literally, Subaru could be flicked away in a second if Garfiel wanted to. Judging from his offense and defense so far, this was all too obvious.

Of the strongest people Subaru had met in this parallel world up to now, Garfiel might easily hold a place among them. Perhaps without reaching the level of Reinhard at the pinnacle, he could, nevertheless, conceivably take on Wilhelm or Julius.

So even as Subaru's words took back a little bit of ground, the probability of him actually retaliating was really equal to zero. But still, Subaru and Garfiel stared squarely into each other's eyes. Even knowing he will lose, he refused to back down... because the reason he cannot back down was just behind him...

Garfiel: "—Hahaha!"

Subaru: "—Hah?"

...It was an unexpected voice that sounded completely out of place.

In the middle of their standoff, Garfiel's laugh leaked out, cutting into the space between them. Subaru let out a confused groan, and Garfiel responded with his action,

Garfiel: "Hiyahahaha! Yer prettygood with words eh. Y'reallydiditdidntyer!"

Subaru: “Wha... Ow! Hey, wha— wait, ow, st—, ow that really hurts!”

Breaking out into a wide laugh that shook his shoulders, Garfiel heartily patted Subaru in the shoulder. But even without the slightest hint of hostility or intention to attack, and even as he was holding back, the gesture, purely seeking friendly contact, was nevertheless cutting down Subaru’s health points in large chunks at a time.

Garfiel: “G’job, y’passed! Went straight through! Th’half-devil... Half-elf, though I don’t like’em much, you have guts protectin’ her, I’ll respect that.”

Subaru: “It’s good you came around... But it really hurts! When are you going to stop patting me? Are you trying to kill me!?”

His enthusiasm unabated, Garfiel’s arm dropped, and Subaru moved a bit further away. Seeing this, the punk tilted his neck, then crossed his powerful arms, and,

Garfiel: “So cold. All that stuff is water under th’bridge now, so c’mon and forget it already. When a man acts petty it means his thing is petty too, y’know.”

Subaru: “That’s the first time I heard you use an idiom that sounds familiar... but my thing is totally none of your business! A-n-y-w-a-y!”

Garfiel shook around a little and gestured with his finger. But seeing him lift up his chin looking smug, Subaru threw his words back at him roughly.

Subaru: “You’re Garfiel, and acquainted with Roswaal, right? Even though we had a fright when we came into contact all of a sudden, there’s no more hostility between us now, right?!”

Garfiel: “Will ya quit making a fuss, it’s gettin’ annoying. Don’t panic I won’t eat ya.”

Subaru: “Who do you think will believe that after that savage attitude a moment ago haaaah...?”

Sticking his fingers in his ears with irritation, Garfiel responded to Subaru’s objections with a “Y’got a point I guess” as if understanding him.

Even though he’s incomprehensible sometimes, it’s a great relief to see that they can communicate with words. And then, having escaped the dire circumstances, Subaru remembered,

Subaru: “Yeah... Hey this is no time for that! Emilia collapsed all of a sudden, what am I doing talking normally just now.”

Garfiel: “Collapsed, y’mean the half-elf? Oy, of course she collapsed. Where do you think this is? What you panickin’ about?”

Rushing over to Emilia’s side, he found her still asleep and breathing irregularly, as if in pain. As Subaru was worrying by her side, Garfiel didn’t seem to think much of it, and only shrugged. Noticing his knowing expression, Subaru asked “What do you mean?”, which brought an incredulous frown onto Garfiel’s face,

Garfiel: “Y’already heard from Roswaal and Frederica what this place was, right? They must have... No way, y’don’t know?”

Even as he was just beginning to explain, Subaru shook his head from side to side, and Garfiel clicked his tongue in frustration. Spitting out “Th’pervert bastard...”, it was easy to see who that insult was referring to.

Garfiel: “Frederica didn’t say anything either? That’s messed up, before y’know it her personality’ll become like her owner’s. Hopeless.”

Shaking his head, Garfiel snorted out in irritation. Then, noticing Subaru’s questioning eyes, he raised up his hand and said “Yeah I gettit I gettit”, and,

Garfiel: “It looks pret’bad, but her life’s in no danger. Only, if you don’t want to see any more of that pain on her face, we needa get goin’ right away. I’ll guide you up to th’village.”

Subaru: “When we move from here, her consciousness will return?”

Garfiel: “That’s what I been sayin’ isntit. Hurry up, we’re gonna go, oy, how long are ya gonna keep sleepin? Get up.”

Even though there wasn’t much explanation, Garfiel didn’t seem intent on explaining further. Turning around without even trying to conceal his thuggish expression, he went out and gave Otto a kick. Receiving the kick, the still-passed-out Otto let out a painful yelp “A-uu”.

Garfiel: “Yer the driver aren’t yer, son of’a. I’ll set the turned’over carriage upright, and y’drive it up to the village. If yer slow I’ll kick yer ass flying, yeah?”

Otto: “Say, what’s with this situation!? Following what I just heard, I get the feeling I’m just on the losing end of everything!”

Hearing this unacceptable version of things, Otto boiled, suddenly standing up to voice his objection to Garfiel. Considering the beating he got just a few minutes ago, this must have seemed tremendously courageous, and Garfiel, who appeared to share this opinion, turned to look at Subaru,

Garfiel: “Oy. This guy, is he always such an energetic bastard?”

Otto: “If you ask that guy, there’s no way you’ll get a proper appraisal so please stop that! Can’t you just make your own observation of what I am! And apologize! Please apologize!!”

Garfiel: “Hah!? The hell, son of’a bitch’s healthy lively all of’a sudden, ya underestimat’ me? Yeah I beat up a guy that didn’t need a beatin’, get over it!”

Subaru: “Can the two of you shut up! Emilia is still in pain, hurry up and grab the reins! And you, get the dragon carriage upright!”

While the three men were making a commotion, and started cursing at each other on the coachman’s stand... Placed aside on the luggage bed, Emilia, who had been unconsciousness up to now, still didn’t wake up. However, a faint frown was stirring up on her pretty face, irritated by the noise,

Emilia: “...Shut up.”

She murmured in a little voice, as if talking in her sleep.

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Garfiel: “Didn’t introduce m’self did I? Name’s Garfiel... Ah, just Garfiel ‘s good. The strongest man alive. Need anything, just ask.”

Subaru: “Oh, I’m Natsuki Subaru... Eh? What was that? You said you’re the strongest? Are you saying that sober?”

As the dragon carriage got moving, sitting face-to-face inside, Subaru and Garfiel exchanged their self-introductions. Seeing Subaru suddenly pull back his outstretched hand with an astonished look, Garfiel also took on an incredulous expression,

Garfiel: “Isn’t that what I said? What’s so strange ‘bout that?”

Subaru: “No no, I just never expected to meet someone who’d straight-out say «I’m the strongest man alive». Even so, isn’t saying that going a bit too far?”

Garfiel: “Y’don’t think I’m fit to be the strongest?”

Subaru: “Well you’re very strong I’ll admit, but if you’re talking about the absolute strongest, how should I say it... No matter what, I have a guy who always comes to mind.”

The form of that red-haired knight emerged in his thoughts... compared to Garfiel in front of his eyes, Subaru’s mind tried to work it out. From their previous exchange, with just his bare hands, Garfiel was a formidable fighter, and could kick a house flying if he wanted to — No, he had flipped the carriage upright with a stamp of his foot just now. But would all this be enough to contend with the Sword Saint, after all?

Even with this in mind, Reinhard’s advantage doesn’t seem to disappear, and Subaru himself wasn’t exactly sure why he held that Knight in such special regard.

Garfiel: “Hah, as you like. I’ll correct your mistaken view sooner or later and prove with my own hands that I’m the strongest. For now, let’s just say «Th’re nosed sea-lion’s afraid o’th’cold», and think of it like that.”

Subaru: “I totally don’t know what you just told me to think about...”

Subaru tilted his neck at that last part, and Garfiel didn’t seem to be planning to explain it, and instead crossed his hands behind his head and relaxed his weight onto the back of his seat. Anyway, their conversation having come to an end, Subaru looked out the window, and brushed his fingers through Emilia’s silver hair as she slept in his lap.

While Emilia has not woken up, her expression had become more restful than before. Just as Garfiel said, moving away from that place seemed to have a positive effect. So then, the next thing on his mind was,

Subaru: “Ah, I didn’t get a chance to properly ask before but, you’re a close acquaintance of Roswaal... aren’t you?”

Garfiel: “You must’ve heard my reputation, right? I’ll say this one more time then, out of all the people associated with Roswaal, I’m by far the strongest.”

Subaru: “That’s not really the point... But I do remember hearing you are an influential person, though.”

Unless brute-force was the only reason he was considered influential? Unlike what Subaru had expected, Garfiel was not much of a supporter in the political sense, but would perhaps be more of a supporter in the muscle-brained sense. With the Sanctuary not far ahead, picking up someone who he at once needed to be cautious of, and who he could have friendly interactions with, really only added to the headache.

Subaru: “That’s just more questions I’ll need to ask Roswaal at the Sanctuary, I guess. You know I’m supposed to be solving problems, but it feels like the number of questions just gets more and more as I go, what’s with this?”

Hugging his own head, seeing the difficult road ahead just getting more difficult, Subaru’s expression clouded over. Listening to this, Garfiel made a small click with his tongue, revealing just a small glimpse of his sharp canine teeth,

Garfiel: “Sanctuary— Eh.”

Sensing some meaning in his murmur, Subaru’s face raised up, and Garfiel gently waved his hand. Then, he stood up, facing the direction ahead—

—That is, towards direction of the Sanctuary.

Garfiel: “It’s because you’re gulping down Roswaal’s words whole without a second thought, that you keep callin’ it by that name. Things you don’t know aside, the things he did tell you are all full of shit y’know that right?”

Subaru: “Even though I have the same opinion, it’s not good to gossip behind someone’s back... Say, did he piss you off or something?”

Garfiel became visibly displeased upon hearing the word Sanctuary. Subaru wondered if he misspoke, and waited, but the reaction was more extreme than he anticipated. That is, Garfiel twisted his mouth into an ironic smile that did not seem to fit,

Garfiel: “Well well, it’s about time the princess-sama wakes up now. Since we’re pretty far from the barrier.”

Subaru: “What’s the barrier... Ah, Emilia-tan?”

Just as he was about to ask his question, Subaru saw Emilia turning over in his lap and called out to her. She opened her eyes faintly and looked around the inside of the carriage hazily. As though she wasn’t completely awake yet, she stared at Subaru with her violet eyes,

Emilia: “Morning, Shubaru...”

Subaru: “Just waking up is suuuper cute, Emilia-tan, but maybe now’s not a good time. How are you feeling, does your head hurt?”

Emilia: “Ehh, not at all? I don’t feel strange or anything...!”

In the middle of her answer Emilia suddenly became wide awake and got up so fast that Subaru had to dodge his head backward. After being an inch away from banging their heads together, Subaru looked back at Emilia, who didn’t seem to have noticed how close it came,

Emilia: “A—are you alright, Subaru? I said I will protect you, but I passed out...”

Subaru: “I managed it somehow, so there’s no need to worry! We came to an understanding through dialogue. People form ties with each other through conversation, and we took the first step in that regard. Though I ran into some communication problems at first...”

As Emilia was shoving closer and closer, Subaru touched her shoulder to try to calm her, while observing her as he spoke. It seems she could stand and walk, and the movements of her eyes and the color of her complexion, and her words and her voice were all impeccable. Also, super cute. Just like always.

Garfiel: “Right? Just like I said, yeah?”

And, as if waiting for Subaru to settle down, Garfiel laughed. But hearing this, Emilia suddenly jumped up in surprise, protecting Subaru behind her, as if only just now noticing the existence of this new stranger in the carriage.

Emilia: “—Who are you!? I warn you, I won’t let you lay a single finger on Subaru.”

Subaru: “Emilia-tan, it’s alright! Also, would you please stop reinforcing my role as the female-lead please! My gauge can’t take much more of it!”

Pulling Emilia out of her combat mode from behind, Subaru turned to Garfiel and introduced him,

Subaru: “That’s Garfiel... Right after Emilia-tan collapsed, he atta... I mean came to ride on the carriage. Not that he’s welcome or anything, but he’s coming along until we get to the Sanctuary.”

Emilia: “...This is Garfiel? The person Frederica mentioned?”

Garfiel: “Well I am curious what she said about me, but we can put that off till later. Look, we’re coming up to th’village soon.”

Hearing Emilia make the exact same comment as Subaru did earlier, Garfiel jerked up his chin without giving them time to organize the situation. He gestured, and ahead of them, the forest was opening up, and the form of the village that was their destination came into view—

Garfiel: “Be welcome, Emilia-sama and her entourage.”

He addressed them with proper title — however, his words did not contain any of the respect or favor, and had instead been served with more of a color of disdain, and a tinge of darkness. Without realizing it, Subaru’s gaze had turned severe, and confusion had emerged in Emilia’s. Receiving both their gazes, Garfiel opened his arms wide, his attitude unchanged,

Garfiel: “The place Roswaal calls the Sanctuary or whatnot— Where half-wits are gathered to spend their days, in the impasse that is the Experimental Grounds, each to their pitiful ends.”

Subaru: “Experimental Grounds...?”

Emilia: “Half-wit——”

While Subaru and Emilia are each drawn to a different part, Garfiel placed a hand over his mouth covering his canine teeth which were showing, smiling, as if to conceal a terribly complicated feeling.

Garfiel: “But we, the residents, call it the Witch of Greed’s Tomb. Laughable, yeah? Heh...”

Echoes of laughter, as if in self-derision, quietly resounded in the car. Low, and faint, like a curse, like a blessing, it resounded throughout.

Listening, Subaru only silently worried about the girl next to him.

If a Witch stands in front of her path again, he must be the one to put out the flames... firmly and resolutely, he told himself.

The Sanctuary approaches.

—To Natsuki Subaru, and to Emilia, it was to be a place that will alter their paths forever.

Arc 4 Chapter 8 - A Long-Awaited Reunion

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 10, Chapter 3 “A Long-Awaited Reunion”, Parts 1-2

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

Even traveling on an unpaved road, there was hardly any turbulence within the dragon carriage. No matter how many times he experiences it, he'd always find the effects of this Divine Protection incredible.

If all this was just the effects of the Divine Protection of Wind Evasion, he wondered what if he could unwind the effects of all the other Divine Protections, and whether he would be using some other word besides “incredible” to describe them then.

Subaru: “...Or something like that, but this isn't the time to be running away from reality, is it.”

Subaru poked his head out into the driver's area beside Otto, looking forward — With the Sanctuary ahead, he focused his eyes on the sight.

Finally treading on earthen road that was no longer covered by grass, about a hundred something meters away, the forest was opening up. Some wooden rooftops were now visible in the distance, for they must have been the many surrounding residences the Sanctuary. From far away, it looked rather like a run-down village, and there seemed to be nothing about it particularly worth noting. And if one had to make a remark, perhaps it would be,

Subaru: “There's a dreary atmosphere about the place...”

Standing in the entryway to the Sanctuary was a tremendously old gate made of stone that only served to emphasize that desolate imagery, and the short wooden fences surrounding the village gave off an impression of a locked cell. Inadvertently, Subaru allowed his thoughts to slip through his lips, and Garfiel, listening, smacked himself in the knee,

Garfiel: “Pret’much! Dreary place, yeah? I’ll say this first, the insides’re even more dreary y’know? No matter who it is, there’s no liveliness inside, they’re all alive but might as well be dead.”

Subaru: “Sounds pretty crappy the way you described it. But the more I listen the less it sounds like a Sanctuary. That’s just...”

Seeing Garfiel enthusiastically affirm his ironic comment, Subaru sighed, and thought back on his previous words. To Subaru and the others who were calling this place Sanctuary, Garfiel did not hide a sense of self-deprecation as he spoke. So then—

Emilia: “The Witch of Greed’s Tomb... what does that mean?”

The same question that came into Subaru’s mind seemed to have also arrived in Emilia’s.

As she suddenly voiced this question her eyes became resolute, but down below, she was gently tugging on the hem of Subaru’s clothing with her fingertips. The fact that she was relying on him gave him a small sense of contentment, but Subaru’s feelings were complicated as he sensed the source of her anxiety.

Subaru: “The Witch— So basically, as the existence referred to by the name of Witch, the Witch of Envy is known to everyone. But the Witches bearing the names of the other Sins, there’s almost nothing known about them, right?”

Emilia: “Eh, really? But, weren’t they a bunch of really famous people from four-hundred years ago?”

Garfiel: “Emilia-sama’s not’ntirely mistaken. But yeah, Subaru’s got it. The Witch of Envy’s just way too famous, there’s no confusion‘bout that. But of th’reords of the other Witches eaten by the Witch of Envy, there’s barely a whiff left of’em. Though there are exceptions.”

Emilia: “Just like here... right?”

After answering Subaru, Garfiel pulled in his jaw at Emilia’s question, smirking. As if quite affected by this, Emilia’s eyes widened, but Subaru, not well-informed on the matters surrounding the Witch, only let out an “Is that so...” as if understanding.

But a sudden notion surged in his mind that blew away that casual air. Because, if there are multiple Witches...

Subaru: “T, that doesn’t mean there’s a Witch Cult for every Witch, does it? Just beating down one Sin Archbishop was tough enough, come on give me a break.”

It was a chilling thought, and one he couldn’t overlook. Reading into the details of Petelgeuse’s words, he imagined they must all have been worshippers of the Witch of Envy. Likewise, Gluttony and Greed who Subaru must one day defeat, and their followers too, must all be in the same category as well. Yet, if there are sects that worship the other Witches—

Otto: “It’s a scary thing to be saying, but there’s no need to worry about that, Natsuki-san.”

But the one who banished the chill running up Subaru’s spine, was the one holding the reins in front, Otto. In the end, compared to Emilia, who knows almost nothing about the Witch Cult, and unlike Garfiel, who was just not quite trustworthy, Otto actually held some kind of credibility, and could provide some insight into the common understanding of things. Because the extent of Otto’s knowledge... was probably exactly what an average person would know.

Otto: “The Witch Cult... Even though I don’t like to say it out loud, only worships the Witch of Envy. To revere another Witch above the Witch of Envy, only a lunatic would do that.”

Subaru: “Above the Witch of Envy...? What do you mean? Are they even worse than the Witch of Envy?”

Otto: “When they hear the name of another Witch other than the one they worship, the Witch Cultists will do some very frightening things. You heard of the city that was destroyed in the Southern Empire of Vollachia, right?”

As Otto suddenly brought up the new topic, Subaru remembered having heard it before. After the battle against Petelgeuse, Wilhelm had mentioned it as he laid out the horrors of the Witch Cult. Certainly it was,

Subaru: “It was the Sin Archbishop of Greed who single-handedly destroyed that city in the what’s-its-name Empire, wasn’t it? I heard that even the nation’s champion couldn’t do anything to stop him.”

Otto: “I don’t recall anything so fantastic, but the reason the Witch Cult did it in the first place was even more frightening. In the isolationist Vollachia Empire, that was the only city where trade was prospering... at the time there were rumors of Witch-related artifacts²⁶ being unearthed there.”

Subaru: “Related to the Witch, huh...”

Otto: “What it was is unclear even now. Only, there were lots of collectors out there who were after it. It’d be fine if it was just for some sick sense of humor, wanting to collect something belonging to the Witch of Envy... But in the end, the entire city perished because of it.”

Perhaps it was to obtain that artifact, or to destroy it, that Greed made his move. The Vollachian Empire had mistakenly roused the Witch Cult and received this catastrophic retribution as a result.

Otto: “After that, even things unrelated to the Witch of Envy, anything that might possibly provoke the Witch Cult is prohibited by decree... But even so, it still didn’t stop these items from circulating in shameless behind-the-scenes dealings.”

Subaru: “It’s rare to hear that kind of spite from you. It almost sounds you were involved?”

Otto: “...It’s nothing worth mentioning. Just back then, some of my relatives were caught up in the city when it happened. It’s been more than fifteen years now; I was just a child back then, so it didn’t have much to do with me.”

After that, Otto closed his mouth and refused to go any further on the topic. Seeing his attitude, Subaru stopped asking, and turned his gaze and attention back into the carriage. In any case, Garfiel was waiting for Subaru to finish processing everything he’s learned, saying “Satisfied now?” while holding his chin in his hand.

Garfiel: “I don’t know the finer points either. But Granny keep goin’ on and on about how it’s the Witch of Greed’s Tomb, like how «Peromeo rots jus’from th’listenin», repeated s’many times, t’can’t be wrong.”

Subaru: “All you know is what the rot-guy told you? So you don’t really know the details either, huh.”

²⁶ Translation note by SummaryAnon: “not clear whether «items/artifacts» is singular or plural”.

Garfiel: “Only thing I care’bout is me being th’strongest. If y’want to know the specifics go grab Roswaal by th’collar and ask’im yerself. N’sure if y’can do it now, though.”

Subaru: “—? What’s that supposed to mea...”

Otto: “Um sorry. It seems we’ve arrived, do we just go in like this?”

Before he could sort out Garfiel’s seemingly loaded words, Otto’s voice hailed from the coachman’s stand in front. Against Otto’s call, Garfiel grumbled “Welp”, and nimbly hopped off the carriage.

Garfiel: “If y’go in w’thout sayin’anything, they’ll take ya for outside intruders an’coord’nate a mass’assault on ya, it’ll be all like’a «laughin Magmarin’s full o’holes». I’ll go in an’tell’em first, y’guys wait here.”

Subaru: “Ah, we’ll leave it to you then. Hey, come to think of it, I get the feeling like you’re the patrol for the Sanctuary or something. Considering how we ran into each other at first...”

On the other hand, the way he seemed to have abandoned his post in the end didn’t quite fit that idea. And the fact that he was patrolling alone, too. But then again, with strength like his, perhaps moving alone was more efficient.

But to Subaru’s last question, Garfiel only lightly waved his hand without answering. Unable to see through him, Subaru’s brows furrowed, and, almost at the same time, Emilia let out an “Ah” in a slightly elevated voice. Turning his eyes to Emilia, who had cried out involuntarily, he saw her pointing ahead. And, following her finger, Subaru immediately understood her surprise as he saw what she had seen. Because standing there, was,

???: “—You’re back, Garfiel. Pretty early, isn’t it.”

Garfiel: ““Cus there’s no need t’circle in th’forest anymore. It’s gotta be rare t’see you leave Roswaal’s side though. He fin’lly dropped dead?”

Ram: “If that is so, this place, Ram will already have burned it down with her own hands in self-abandon. You have Roswaal-sama to thank that this is not the case.”

Garfiel: “That’some incredible logics, I can’t understand it at all!”

Dressed in the familiar maid's uniform, the girl's peach-colored hair was swaying as she faced Garfiel. Unlike Garfiel, who was happily smiling, her expression seemed cold and without emotion. Taking a long time to confirm this, Subaru's shoulders dropped as if relieved.

Otto: "Haaa, so that's the older sister I heard so much about. I see... Of course, this is only natural, but she looks exactly like the young miss who's sleeping."

And having seen her for the first time, Otto let out this remark. In front of their eyes, she looked like a perfect replica of the Rem Otto had seen, but only, inside, it was a completely different person. For this, was the long-awaited reunion with the good-for-nothing maid of the Roswaal Mansion, Ram.

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Subaru: "—Ram!"

Sticking his body out of the dragon carriage, Subaru waved to Ram. Her eyes slightly squinted as she saw him, and, quite understandably, she shrugged and shook her head.

Ram: "I humbly do not know where Barusu popped out from, but your late arrival is certainly disappointing. You should have noticed sooner that something had gone wrong and... Ah, but that's too much for Barusu's abilities, after all."

Subaru: "If you're going to use a phrase like «I humbly do not know», stick with that tone all the way and don't change it all of a sudden! And Roswaal too, I can't understand what you guys are thinking, but I'll definitely have something to say when I get a hold of him!"

Objecting, Subaru pointed a finger at the girl whose attitude had not changed at all. Seeing this reaction from Subaru, Ram dropped her shoulders, before turning to Emilia, who was standing beside him. Relieved to see that Emilia, same as Subaru, was safe, Ram's face relaxed. And for a brief moment, in her eyes, Subaru thought there was a fleeting, almost dreamlike glimpse of sorrow. Yet, in that same instant, it had already vanished.

Ram: "Emilia-sama too, welcome. Roswaal-sama is waiting, so please come with me to the inner building. Garfiel, go find a suitable place for the dragon carriage and the driver."

Garfiel: "What's with that treatment, oy! Can't y'ask for help in a way that inspires more enthusiasm?"

Ram: "If you want to eat a meal crafted by Ram's own hands, please strive to do your best. But if you want to throw away this valuable opportunity because of your careless words, Ram won't say anything more."

Garfiel: "Alright! Alright already! Can't grab'a hold o'her at'all, though it's good like that. Oy, asshole driver. Park the ground dragons an'the carriage at the end there, an'come wit' me."

Otto: "It's about time I introduced myself right!? Could you please not call me with that insulting name!? Also, isn't it a bit dangerous for me to be left alone with this guy!"

As Otto voiced his objection at Garfiel, who had just been vanquished by Ram, Subaru, seeing this, shot him a thumbs-up with teeth sparkling,

Subaru: "I'll recover your bones!"

Otto: "That was definitely something said with good intentions but carries the completely wrong implications wasn't it!? Really, if anything happens to me, I'm going to claim for compensation!"

Leaving behind these words, Otto, having let Subaru and Emilia off the dragon carriage, followed after Garfiel. Seeing them start off toward the interior of the village, Subaru rubbed Patrasche in the nose in a reluctant goodbye. Then, turning with a snap of his neck, saying "Now then",

Subaru: "There's a whole array of things I want to ask and talk to you about, now that we're here can we finally talk?"

Ram: "...Ram hasn't been granted permission to convey anything to you. You can ask Roswaal-sama directly when you meet him. Though I don't know how much Garf had let slip already."

Subaru: "Garf... ah, you mean Garfiel. That guy turned out to be a whole lot different from the impression I got from just hearing his name. Come to think of it, there's something that's been bothering me."

Ram: "What is it?"

Sharply, Ram furrowed her brows. Imagining it might be information Roswaal had given express instructions not to reveal, her gaze became serious, but, seeing this, Subaru let out a “Naah it’s just”, as he folded his arms,

Subaru: “That guy, does he have a crush on you? I got that feeling from the way he was talking.”

Ram: “...And here I was wondering what you were going to say.”

Unable to hide her genuine astonishment, Ram sighed. Only, seeing how she didn’t deny it, Subaru couldn’t help but let out an out-of-place grin.

Subaru: “Well I’m not saying he has strange tastes, but. You look cute... but the fact that he still likes you after being around you for so long, I think he must have some serious resolve.”

Ram: “Being gifted with both intelligence and beauty, males will inevitably be attracted to Ram, there’s nothing I can do about that. But Ram has already devoted her all to someone who she shall always stay devoted to, so I have no wish for such things.”

With a sway of her shoulders, Ram responded to Subaru’s sarcastic words, and, in a single stroke, she had cut down Garfiel’s hopes with her response. Then, turning her back to Subaru and Emilia, she left the words “Come with me”, as she immediately took her step forward.

Although he wasn’t exactly trying to make the flowers of love bloom, her cold attitude still made Subaru feel like he was coming away empty handed. But the fact that he could not ask what he should have asked, was, understandably, because he was afraid.

Subaru: “At a time like this, am I still too much of a coward to say Rem’s name... Even though I want to... Even...”

He was terrified of the confirmation. Having already heard it from Emilia and Petra that they cannot remember Rem, now, to ask her own sister whether she has forgotten her existence too?

But, having come here, the fact that she did not ask about Rem’s absence, already meant that there was no point in asking anymore.

Subaru: “Can’t help but cave-in to her either way. Then let’s follow Ram for now, Emilia-tan. —What’s wrong?”

Subaru turned to Emilia, who had kept her silence up to now. Ever since stepping off the carriage, she had not opened her mouth, but only looked around at her surroundings anxiously. Noticing Subaru’s call, she let out a “No...” slightly shaking her head.

Emilia: “It’s just, I can’t seem to calm down. How should I say it, there’s a strange feeling... It’s not something I can put into words.”

Subaru: “Can’t calm down, huh. For me, a shy loner who’s reluctant to even leave the house, all this is like a new world, you know. Everyone gets this feeling, I think... In fact, I don’t particularly hate it myself.”

Looking around along with Emilia, everything looked very much like the image of a run-down village. Perhaps, compared to Arlam Village, the houses appeared older, and in a greater state of disrepair, but these were merely relative, insignificant details. Nevertheless, the place was not without a certain sense of incongruity about it. Although what that incongruity was, Subaru wasn’t quite sure either.

Subaru: “But we don’t have much choice even if we keep our guards up, Emilia-tan. Ram and Ros-chi are both here, so at least we shouldn’t be in any danger, I think.”

Emilia: “It’s not that I’m keeping my guard up... No, I’m ok now. But really, if only I could talk to Puck...”

The crystal stone at her chest — Touching the green stone beneath her neck, Emilia called out anxiously to the name of the spirit sealed within. The absence of the great spirit that always stayed by her side obviously brought her anxiety to no end. And to see her so fragile, Subaru despised himself for not being the existence that she can rely on.

Emilia: “—Subaru?”

Subaru: “Let’s go. No matter what happens, leave it to your number two shield.”

Without thinking, he grabbed the hand that was touching the crystal, and turned his face away as he said this. Then, holding her hand like this, before she could even say no, he swung out his stride. And naturally, Emilia only followed behind his forceful attitude.

Having done so without any consideration, just the thought of his embarrassing act made fire fly out of every pore of his face. But, much more than thought, he had chosen to follow his emotion, and merely hoped that this was not seen as strange.

Emilia: “—Ok.”

Only, unlike Subaru’s heart, which was about to jump out of his chest, Emilia slightly nodded, and did not let go of his hand.

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It was the only house in the Sanctuary that preserved some semblance of a proper shape.

Constructed out of stone, the single-story building was similar in size to a single-family house of his original world. Its rooms arranged in a simple layout, one could almost imagine living an equally simple and cozy life here.

Although compared to the Roswaal and Karsten mansions, having grown accustomed to a certain standard of living, Subaru found it rather cramped. But, of course, in time, with a little bourgeois-spirit, he could easily grow used to living in such a place. For this, was the impression of the place of their meeting. So then,

Roswaal: “Yaaaaaaa, Emilia-sama and Subaru-kun. Iii get the feeling that this is quite the long-awaited reunion, doon’t you think hmm?”

With a carefree smile, and waving his hand at them, this was how Roswaal greeted them as they saw each other again.

After parting in the capital, this was the first time Subaru met face to face with Roswaal. And as they had not seen each other in the previous loops, it had actually been over a month. Considering all the pent-up resentment accumulated during that time, he had wanted to do nothing less than to punch him across the face at the earliest opportunity, but,

Roswaal: “Fiiiiirst of all, more than anything, it’s sooo good to see you safe, Emilia-sama. Ram’s already told me about the problems around the maansion. If anything should have happened to you, I would surely have lost the will to go on liiiving.”

Subaru: “If that’s what you feel, you should have at least made some better preparations... Actually, more importantly, what the hell happened to you? What is this!?”

Even as Roswaal seemed relieved to see Emilia safe, Subaru and Emilia were beside themselves with consternation. For all the countless things they had wanted to say, had all of a sudden vanished like a parting mist when they saw Roswaal.

Lying on the bed... All manner of wounds that cannot be overlooked littered his body, as blood seeped through the bandages constricting his figure into a pitifully painful posture. At Subaru’s question and Emilia’s silent gaze, Roswaal used his left arm, which was relatively less injured, to gently pull up the eye-patch that was covering his left eye.

Roswaal: “Aaaaaayaaaaa, aaare you asking about these? Iii am only a man, aaafter all. Being seen in this pitiful state wounds my self-esteem, so if you could please understand my desire to reeest a little.”

Emilia: “That’s not good enough, is it. What really happened, Roswaal? Getting wounded like this... and how did you, of all people...”

Not distracted by his jest, Emilia retorted as she extended a trembling finger towards him, hesitating whether to touch the body ridden with wounds. Seeing her do this, Roswaal smiled bitterly, and turned his right eye up to the ceiling, “Well then...” he whispered,

Roswaal: “Wheeeere should Iii begin hm? Weell, I guess you could say my injuries were sustained for something of a matter of honor, and out of regard for propriety, I had nooo choice.”

Emilia: “Stop trying to get away with these roundabout words. I am asking you seriously, Roswaal, so answer me seriously in return.”

Roswaal: “...Myyy it seems Emilia-sama is in an especially bad mood. Buuut, considering where we are, there’s no avoooiding it perhaps.”

Even Subaru felt that something was out of place when he heard Emilia's relentless, inquisitive tone, and it was at the same moment, that Roswaal pointed this out. Emilia slightly angled up her eyebrows, but, realizing that what he had pointed out was true, she lightly bit her lip.

Emilia: "My head is all a mess; I can't calm down at all. What is this place? Even though it's called the Sanctuary, I don't think that's what it is at all. Then this place is..."

Roswaal: "A Witch's Grave, that's an easier name to accept, no?"

Emilia: "—!"

The tone of Roswaal's voice dropped as he pronounced these words. The same words from Garfiel being uttered in Roswaal's mouth, the phrase suddenly took on a sense of some heavy and sonorous meaning.

Swiftly, Emilia shot her gaze toward Subaru. Seeing the complex tangle of emotions in her eyes, Subaru lowered his chin in a nod, in tune with her unease.

Subaru: "Hold on, let's get everything we want to ask in order first. If we go on like this, the conversation is only going to drift all over, and we won't get a single conclusion out of him."

Roswaal: "Oohhh yaaa? In the short time we haven't seen each other, you've gotten quite good at settling accounts, no? Subaru-kun, just what could have brought on this change in your state of mind?"

Subaru: "If we're going to get into that it'll take a really long time, so I'll leave the bragging for after we've heard everything we want to know. Ah, right, there was just this one thing..."

Staring at Roswaal's mocking smile, Subaru lifted a finger,

Subaru: "We've established the alliance with Crusch-san, but you must have already heard it from Ram... you're glad you left me behind, aren't you?"

Roswaal: "—Very glad. After all, I was right to have picked you up."

Seeing Roswaal relax the corner of his lips with satisfaction, Subaru sighed and closed his eyes. Subaru had anticipated this, but the fact remains, his actions were exactly as Roswaal planned. Even if he had

already allowed himself to be used, it still wasn't fun to hear the confirmation. Anyway, Subaru arranged his next thought,

Subaru: "Firstly then, the villagers of Arlam Village. Since Ram is safe, they must be fine as well, and all evacuated safely, right?"

Roswaal: "You can rest assuuured. Perhaps my current state doesn't give me much credibility but, I stiill know my respooonsibilities as Lord. Such thing as to risk my life to protect my subjects, I too have that resolve. I've seen to it that everyone's sheltered in the village's cathedral."

Subaru: "Cathedral... Ah, we can get back to that later, so the next thing is..."

He was relieved to confirm the villagers' safety. Since Subaru had only made the decision to evacuate along with the preparations beforehand, whether they were safe in the end was the final concern left over from the previous loops— Because no matter what, a part of that could no longer be redone.

Relaxing his shoulders, Subaru gave Emilia a look. And receiving it, she inclined her head, drawing back her slender chin,

Emilia: "Then, tell me about this place. You call it Sanctuary, but Garfiel calls it the Witch of Greed's Tomb. Just which one is true?"

Roswaal: "Both are true, Emilia-sama. This is the site of the once-Witch of Greed's— Echidna's final resting place. And to me personally, it is a place that should called Sanctuary."

Subaru: "—Witch."

Emilia: "Echidna..."

Hearing his answer, Subaru and Emilia's throats simultaneously clogged up.

Roswaal spoke quietly, and all the clownish demeanor he had been using until now had vanished from his voice. Precisely because of this, for the first time, his words carried an unmistakable flavor of honesty. Drawing in a deep breath, Emilia blinked a few times, and continued once more,

Emilia: "The Witch of Greed... was another Witch who was annihilated by the Witch of Envy, wasn't she?"

Roswaal: “Een, that is right. No matter where you look in the history of the current world, nothing remains of her name anymore. Only, except in the memories of those who knew her...”

Subaru: “Wait wait wait, but what you just said makes no sense.”

Subaru interrupted Roswaal’s solemn words with a quick wave of his hand. Roswaal narrowed his single eye, gazing into Subaru, who was little by little succumbing to the pressure of his aura.

Subaru: “If I remember correctly, the Witch of Greed... was defeated by the Witch of Envy, four-hundred years ago. This place being the final resting place of a Witch from four-hundred years ago might be understandable... but what you’re saying is that you knew her in person, but that’s just...”

Roswaal: “Iii know this myself, but Iii’m afraid I can’t say. Because this is passed down verbally through generation after generations of the Mathers family... Only to the heir of Roswaal.”

Emilia: “Passed down verbally... Then the head of the Mathers family of long ago was once connected to the Witch of Greed?”

Roswaal: “—Echidna.”

Emilia: “Eh?”

Suddenly, hearing the name brought up, Emilia’s eyes opened wide. Roswaal turned his gaze towards her, and, as if to confirm once more, quietly whispered, Echidna”,

Roswaal: “Pleease, call her by name when referring to her. A title like the Witch of Greed, no matter how you say it, carries an evil impression about it, dooon’t you think? And it’s so long, too...”

Emilia: “...I see. So then, Echidna met her end in this village, and this village has then been managed by the Mathers family for generation after generation... Is that right?”

Roswaal: “Een, that is correct. Though managing implies more hands-on work than there is. Echidna’s influence remains thickly here, and without the proper steps, it’d be impossible to set foot in here. The fact that you were able to enter... must have been thanks to Frederica’s assistance, isn’t that so?”

Receiving a nod of affirmation in return, a sense of understanding emerged in Roswaal’s eyes. Seeing this, Subaru pursued the topic,

Subaru: "I understand this is Echidna's grave, and under your management. But what I don't understand is its purpose, and why you and the villagers haven't returned yet."

Roswaal: "I may have just said some strange things, buuut you seem to have accepted them quite reaaadily. The fact that this is a Witch's Tomb, lii had really wanted to keep that a secret..."

Subaru: "Maybe if it was the Witch of Envy, but I really have no idea what the Witch named Echidna had done. Just the word Witch immediately gives the impression of some kind of villain. But then it's the same thing with half-elf, and who could have guessed that Emilia-tan is so cute just from that word?"

Emilia: "...D-d-don't say irrelevant things like that. Surprise-attacks are off limits you know!"

Hearing the pick-up line casually inserted into the end of that otherwise serious sentence, Emilia, whose face had turned bright red, lightly yanked at the side of Subaru's waist. Subaru smiled wryly at her totally cute retaliation, but then, he noticed Roswaal in the corner of his eyes giving off a rather annoying laugh "Ohooo-",

Roswaal: "In the shooort time you've spent apart, you've grown quite a bit closer, haaven't you. After leaving with that fight in the Capital, I was wondering just what would happen, but it seems now it's even better than befooore."

Subaru: "That's the love received at the end of a long and arduous journey you know! There's a mountain of things I can brag about, but let's leave that for after you've finished answering our questions. So, what is the purpose of this place, and why haven't you returned."

Roswaal: "It seems you aren't a naive child anymore, and have become quite dependable indeed. Sooo then, the reeason the villagers and I have not returned... Simply put, we can't return even if we waaanted to."

Subaru: "Can't return even if you wanted to?"

Unable to understand his answer, Subaru furrowed his brows. Roswaal nodded, and smiling at the question mark emerging on Subaru's face, said,

Roswaal: “Because right now, every ooone of us, and the residents of this village included, are all in a state of house-arrest. Aaaand, from the moment you entered here, it seems you two are also in the saaame situation.”

Arc 4 Chapter 9 - The Graveyard

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 10, Chapter 3 “A Long-Awaited Reunion”, Part 3, and Volume 10, Prologue “Tomb”

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken – [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#), [Part 4](#)

Subaru: “House arrest now... That’s an unsettling word...”

Facing Roswaal, who was lying on the bed, Subaru barely managed to wrench out these words while carefully analyzing the sentence which had just been spoken at him. Judging from the flow of the conversation, he might normally have laughed it off as a stupid joke, but unfortunately, in the current circumstances they appeared to be authentic. At any rate,

Emilia: “So then, does that mean the villagers here gave you these injuries?”

Emilia seemed to have arrived at the same opinion as Subaru on the general believability of his words. Bound in bandages seeped in blood, Roswaal’s body was in a pitiful state. Seeing him like this was at least proof that some of what he said was true and was the reason why it could not simply be laughed off.

Subaru: “If there’s someone in the village who could give such serious injuries to Roswaal, that means we’re in a pretty serious situation...”

Touching his hand to his jaw, while tracing over the respective strengths in his mind, Subaru felt a burning sense of unease in his chest.

The existence of Roswaal L. Mathers, besides being Subaru’s patron in this parallel world, was a powerful magic user at a level only very few others could hope to reach. In fact, the strength of the man who occupied the position of Head Magician of the Royal Court of Lugunica was such that even a hundred

Subarus would not have a chance of winning against it, and could easily annihilate a horde of Witchbeasts while humming. To think that he would end up in this state...

Roswaal: "Ah, but it seems like you misunderstooood. My wounds weren't infliiicted byyy anyone. There's no need to be on guard for anything strange, or plan any kind of revenge for my sake, ookk?"

Subaru: "Don't worry. You haven't saved up enough positive impressions for me to go off recklessly seeking revenge... But more importantly, what is that supposed to mean? That's different from what you just said. Aren't you supposed to be under house arrest...?"

Roswaal: "Considering that I'm injured and being restrained like this, calling it house arrest is not wrooong, surely. It's not that I was injured in the process of being restrained, I was injured, and theeen restrained... Though if I were to explain it in detail, it would be a liiittle different."

In response to Roswaal's roundabout manner of speaking, a question mark flew out of the top of Subaru's head. Breaking everything down, he managed to calm himself and sorted through the context of what was said, and in other words,

Subaru: "So, the people of Sanctuary have nothing to do with your injuries, is that right?"

Roswaal: "Strictly speaking, one can't exactly saaay that they're unrelated, but if you were to ask me whether they were directly responsible for my injuries then the answer is no. In other words, thaaat's how it iiis."

Subaru: "In other words, they're indirectly related then."

Roswaal inclined his head, and for a moment appeared to be embarrassed by Subaru's analysis. Then letting out a small sigh, "It's like watching a child grow up, I guess...", he joked. Seeing that attitude, Subaru took it as a sign that he was coming closer to the truth. Determined not to let up his questioning, he chose his next words and prepared to throw them at Roswaal, but...

Ram: "—Barusu, how about showing Roswaal-sama a little bit of care?"

Saying so, Ram, who had not been present until now, interjected herself into the conversation. With the hem of her skirt lightly swinging, the girl crossed the room with graceful steps, and placed the steaming set of tea she had been carrying on a tray neatly onto the table.

Its fragrance spread throughout the room, and with the stimulation of his olfactory senses, Subaru only now realized how inconsiderate he had been. For just when he was about to pursue his questioning, he suddenly noticed just how severe Roswaal's wounds actually appeared.

Ram: "Pressing Roswaal-sama so hard when he's so severely injured, digging to the bottom of everything, are you satisfied? Look at Roswaal-sama suffering, almost crying, have some sympathy."

Subaru: "Just when you've made me reflect on my actions... don't say something that ruins the mood! I mean, is this supposed to be him hurting and about to cry? Doesn't look like it to me!"

Roswaal: "Uuuuh, it huuurts, I'm in paaain. Words lacking in kindness and concern hit me right in my woounds..."

So Subaru responded to Ram's words with a brash retort. As if mocking Subaru's remarks, Roswaal started a little performance on the bed. As Subaru's eyebrows started to twitch in annoyance, Emilia cleared her throat and pulled the room back from the turbulent atmosphere. While drawing the eyes of all three people in the room to her, she started with an "In any case."

Emilia: "Anyone can tell that Roswaal isn't well just by looking, so let's finish this conversation quickly. You haven't had healing magic cast on you?"

Ram: "Magic that heals is outside of Ram's area of expertise, so..."

In response to Ram's expressionless, yet somehow clearly regretful answer, Emilia looked at Roswaal with eyes which held only little expectation. Seeing this, Roswaal waved his raised hand from side to side,

Roswaal: "I too, am specialized in destruction magic yooou see. If it's to do with destroying, harming or deceiving I can generally do pretty much anything, but I'm hopeless when it comes to spells related to healing."

Subaru: "That's a sad way to put it. Rather than just offensive spells, you should make sure to practice with some defensive spells as well, jeez..."

That said, whenever Subaru played a game in which he had to decide on his character growth, he was the type of super offense-focused player who would only pick attack-oriented skills. So he couldn't scold

Roswaal too harshly. At the same time as when Subaru reached this strange acceptance, Emilia sighed “It can’t be helped”, and,

Emilia: “Puck isn’t here so I’m not at my best, but I’ll cast the healing magic. I have to concentrate while I do it though, so we’ll have to finish talking first.”

Roswaal: “The Great Spirit-sama...?”

Shocked at the information Emilia had just spilled, Roswaal quickly raised his eyebrows, then narrowed his eyes. That somewhat cold expression, unlike the usually relaxed demeanor, was one which Subaru had rarely seen. He unwittingly contracted his shoulders and said—

Subaru: “Oy oy. It’s rare to see you with a serious expression. Is it so surprising that Puck isn’t here? I hadn’t realized that you were actually a closet fluff-enthusiast...”

Roswaal: “Unfortunately, the only time I have gotten close enough to Great Spirit-sama to be able to touch it was when I respectfully offered it maayonnaaaise. It was really scary— Anyway, lii see.”

Without even ignoring Subaru’s banter, Roswaal narrowed his brow in rumination. While doing this, he suddenly turned his yellow left pupil onto Emilia,

Roswaal: “Emilia-sama, you aren’t feeling ill, or different from normal in aaany way, right?”

Emilia: “...? Other than Puck not showing his face, not really. Puck not coming out started a little while before we reached the Sanctuary too, so... Ah, but there is one thing.”

Raising a finger as if asking a question, Emilia then proceeded to quickly whip her gaze around at their surroundings — Not only inside of the room they were in, but seeming as if she was looking over the entirety of the Sanctuary outside of it, and after doing so, she said in a lowered voice,

Emilia: “Since entering the Sanctuary... No, maybe ever since entering the forest, I feel like the responses from Spirits have become dull. And just now, when we were just outside, I... felt a strange gaze on me.”

Subaru: “A strange... gaze?”

Surprised at what he heard, Subaru inclined his head, to which Emilia responded “Yes” and pulled in her chin in confirmation. After explaining that this was the reason why her expression had darkened after they parted ways with Garfiel and the others earlier, she continued,

Emilia: “It felt like I was being stared at. It felt reeeaaally unpleasant... I thought it might just be me, so I didn’t tell you.”

Roswaal: “Neither of Emilia-sama’s feeeeelings are mistaken. This is a place which is unpleasant for the Spirits, and further, its inhabitants harbor nothing but unpleeeasant feeeeelings towards you.”

In response to Emilia’s anxious words, Roswaal poured out a stream of words devoid of any consideration. Seeing her eyes hurt and wavering, Subaru instantly turned on Roswaal and was about to open his mouth to object, but,

Garfiel: “Well, how ‘bout y’leave it there. You shouldn’t be so hard on’a wounded man. «Th’running spotted-beak’s hot now», isn’t it.”

Subaru: “I guess that’s true unfortunately... not that I’m understanding enough of that to say I agree. But this is just a tiny complaint, we’ve totally established a translatable communication between us, haven’t we?”

Looking over his shoulder, Subaru shrugged as he saw Garfiel leaning against the door, baring his teeth. Seeing his reaction, Garfiel made a noise grinding his teeth, and looked around the room.

Garfiel: “Granny’s home’s supposed th’most spacious and proper one here, but with so many people, it gets cramped, huh. Guess I was right to leave that noisy guy behind.”

Subaru: “Now that you mention it, I don’t see Otto around... Did he go home? Did you eat him?”

Emilia looked shocked at Subaru’s question, but Garfiel laughed out loud and slapped his knees, as if he’d just heard an amazing joke.

Garfiel: “I do have the blood of’a carnivore, but I don’t think I’d eat him. Especially ‘cause that guy seems like he’d get even more noisy when I’m eating him. He said something about being worried about the dragon and the cart... Well, he pretty much jus’ came up with some excuse and legged it.”

With one arm swinging, and strutting over brutishly, Garfiel plunked himself down on a chair near the wall, and looked up at Ram, who was watching him sideways,

Garfiel: "Tea."

Ram: "I will go outside to collect some fallen leaves, so will you please wait for me?"

Subaru: "Even though I have a suspicion, but what will you be doing with those fallen leaves?"

Ram: "I have no intention of wasting precious tea leaves on the sort who has no understanding of neither fragrance nor taste. That is Ram's answer."

Having stated this in cold blood, Ram then earnestly went out the building. Pointing a finger up at Ram's back, Subaru looked at Garfiel, wordlessly asking "What do you like about her?" In response to that, while chasing her back with his look,

Garfiel: "Strong-willed women are worth the chase, ain't that so? And being a male, getting strongly attracted to excellent females ain't such a strange thing."

Subaru: "Stuff like males and females, we're not talking about telling chickens apart, so don't keep using that. In spite of everything, Ram is a proper young woman, you know. Calling her that..."

Garfiel: "Huh? What're you sayin'? I'm treatin' her as properly as any woman could ask to be treated yeah? Also, before that we..."

As Subaru offered his frank advice on his unusual way of speaking, Garfiel frowned as if he just noticed something, and raised his eyebrows. His face then took on a displeased expression, and he turned a gaze filled with swords onto Roswaal on the bed,

Garfiel: "Son of'a, y'haven't told 'em yet? If it wer' jus' you gettin' crumpled I'd brush it off as a joke, but, since that half-elf... since Emilia-sama's come here, it's a whole different matter."

Emilia: "—Eh?"

Garfiel had put his annoyance to his tongue and stamped it out. Emilia was surprised at hearing her name come out in the middle of his remark. But, with no regard for her astonishment, Garfiel snapped at Roswaal with an expression that was even more overflowing with anger than before.

Garfiel: “The moment Emilia-sama entered the Sanctuary, we got caught up in this mess y’know. Watcha gonna do about it? Ya haven’t even begun to go into the main issue here yet. Son of’a, did ya’ll jus come here to fool around?”

The latter half of his anger wasn’t just directed at Roswaal, but at Subaru and Emilia as well, who had also gone silent. Particularly, the rage dwelling in the look he aimed at Emilia was no laughing matter, and as if to protect her, who was pulling her shoulders closer together, Subaru stepped forward.

Subaru: “Hold on. I get that you’re angry, but I don’t even have a clue why. You’ll just get more and more angry if you keep talking to someone who hasn’t got a clue, right?”

Garfiel: “But that’s what pisses me off. When the person all this is about ain’t even got a clue...”

Subaru: “But the one disregarding «the person all this is about» and talking over her head is you and Roswaal over there, isn’t it? If you really are concerned with that problem and want to do something about it, fulfill your responsibility to explain it. Expecting us to get it without explaining anything makes you just as shameless as I was just a short while back you know.”

As he was facing him, Subaru felt the pressure coming from Garfiel getting a whole level stronger. Garfiel’s stature was smaller than Subaru’s, and as he was currently sitting, the height difference was quite significant.

In spite of this, the smallness of his stature was almost unnoticeable. No, considering the density of the pressure emanating from him, to Subaru, Garfiel appeared to be something like a massive boulder.

Knowing that Subaru was naturally chicken-hearted, averting his eyes and taking a step back would only have been expected, but—

Emilia: “Subaru...”

Tightly, Subaru felt a delicate finger entangle itself onto his sleeve. The sound of a voice seemingly devoid of confidence calling him slid past his earlobes, and invested his trembling knees with renewed strength. Emilia was standing behind him. Relying on him in her uncertainty. As if he would really let his knees buckle in front of her, could he do something as lame as that?

Garfiel: “—Tch.”

They exchanged a stare in silence, and the first to avert his gaze was Garfiel. As he clicked his tongue, and entrusted his weight to the back of his seat, he stuffed his finger into his short, golden hair, and began to scratch at it violently.

Garfiel: “Aaah! I know, I was jus’ takin’ it out on you. I snapped, I said I’m sorry, oy!”

Subaru: “No, you haven’t really said that. But before that, didn’t anyone ever tell you about your really annoying personality?”

As quick as he was to become emotional and shortsighted, he was just as quick to take back his rationality and acknowledge his faults. Subaru thought that personality must be so rough to have, and rather than indignation he put on a wry smile.

Seeing this, Garfiel let out an unbecoming sigh “Haaa”,

Garfiel: “Shut up, I’ll be quiet, so get the conversation going in the meantime, ‘cause if I join in, the talk ain’t gonna go nowhere and it’ll become annoying.”

Subaru: “The fact that you’ve analyzed yourself this well, but then went all the way around without changing anything... I find that pretty amazing.”

Garfiel: “Complimentin’ me’s pointless, since I don’t really understand complicated things. Tch.”

Seeing Subaru go from exasperation to admiration, Garfiel snorted. Just then, Ram, returning from outside, handed him a cup of steaming tea.

Ram: “This is the definition of low-grade tea.”

Garfiel: “Shouldn’t you usually speak a bit more politely when giving someone something?”

Ram replied with a “Is that so” and handed the cup over with a composed expression. Garfiel received the tea, and, even though it was probably burning hot, poured it all down his throat in one go. Although he was carnivorous, he apparently didn’t have a sensitive tongue. Seeing him empty the whole cup in one gulp, Ram let out a deep sigh.

Ram: “As usual, you are a man who has no regard for tea. That doesn’t suit Ram.”

Garfiel: “But it just tastes like leaves. If yer want to whet yer throat, water’s the same. Right?”

Subaru: “While I agree that tea tastes exactly like leaves, I can’t help but have some reservations against such an extreme argument. Ram, how about letting him drink the other cup of tea?”

As Subaru pointed it out, Ram handed the other cup of tea to Garfiel. Its wavy color faintly resembled something along the lines of Autumn Leaves, and even having noticed this from a distance, Subaru couldn’t stop himself from... Well, recommending it.

Garfiel: “Hey, you’re pretty sensible after all, aren’t ya. You get that just one cup isn’t enough... Pfft! Haah!? Ooy, you... Isn’t this one just leaf water...?”

Ram: “If it wets your throat, whether it’s water, tea or leaf water it’s all the same, correct? Since you’ve already put it on your lips, go ahead and drink the whole thing. If you leave anything... I will twist it off.”

Without saying what exactly she would be twisting off, she shot a sharp glare at Garfiel’s crotch. Just from that, Subaru realized that her target was the vitals, and unconsciously closed up his legs at the sense of danger. Garfiel reluctantly emptied the cup of its contents, wringing at the bitterness. And on the side, Roswaal, who had so far only been observing their conversation, suddenly spouted,

Roswaal: “Aaaaaha. Are aaall of you even worried about my condition and have any intention of allowing me to rest? Or is it your actual plan to make me laugh and oopen up my wounds? If that’s the case, you’re certainly succeeeding.”

Saying so, Roswaal lightly touched the bandage wrapped around the upper part of his head while grinning bitterly. In fact, one could see a faint red color beginning to spread across the white of the fabric. Just then, the mood of the room, which had been relaxed up until now, turned, and Ram, whose face had changed colour, approached Roswaal. She then covered his hand, which was pressing down on the wound, with her own, and

Ram: “I’m very sorry, Roswaal-sama. Even though Ram was by your side...”

Subaru: “Wasn’t it your tea jokes that made sure he would laugh?”

His disruption was silenced by a rock-shattering glare from Ram, and Subaru zipped it, and took a quick look at Roswaal’s condition. At least, the bleeding didn’t seem to be connected to anything serious. The

wounds must have only stopped bleeding recently —in other words, now was probably the most important time for his recovery.

Emilia: “Roswaal, I think it’d be best if I treat you after all...”

Roswaal: “Nooo that would not be necessary, Emilia-sama.”

Reaching the same conclusion as Subaru, Spirits emerged in the air surrounding Emilia as she stepped toward Roswaal. But, she was stopped by Roswaal himself shaking his head. The Spirits, which were shining with a blue-white phosphorescence, wavered, as if affected by their mistress’ uncertainty. Watching the side of Emilia’s fair cheeks, Subaru noticed.

—As the emerging Spirits floated around Emilia, for reasons Subaru could not understand, Garfiel stared at her with eyes of frozen emotion.

Roswaal: “After all, right now, there’s something much more important than my trifling injuries. It’s not like my life is in any danger, so please prioritize the other matter first.”

Emilia: “Even if you say that, there’s no way I can do that. When there is a person who’s injured, to set that aside for something else would be...”

Roswaal: “Even if I tell you this is necessary for you to sit upon the throne?”

Emilia’s usual rhythm shattered, and the scene of her about to heal him by force if necessary, froze up. Listening to Roswaal’s statement, Emilia’s cheeks grew stiff, and her violet eyes opened wide. The yellow left eye watching this in front sharpened as if peering into her, gleamed enigmatically,

Roswaal: “To the house of Mathers, this Sanctuary is just a piece of land which had been passed down through the generations, but to Emilia-sama’s future, it is of profound... Yes, of profound significance. Therefore, no matter what, I certainly intended to eventually invite you here— It’s just, you showed up a little earlier than I had planned... No?”

Emilia: “Necessary for me...? Hey, what is that supposed to mean...”

Roswaal: “The problem with this Sanctuary, and Emilia-sama’s problem are intimately tied. So perhaps, in this place, you would find it. Emilia-sama’s support, that is.”

Emilia: “—!?”

Frozen in place, Subaru watched as Emilia’s expression changed. Having prompted this change, Roswaal observed her expression, and seemed to take it in as if all was according to plan. On the other hand, Subaru, still unable to pick up the exchange of emotions between the two, was left with an itch in his teeth. However, before that agitation could be turned into words, Roswaal pointed to the silent Garfiel.

Roswaal: “Your designation, Garfiel. Guide these two to the Sanctuary— Rather, the tomb.”

Garfiel: “—Heh, that a good idea?”

Swinging his emptied porcelain cup from side to side on his finger, Garfiel let out a low laugh. In response to being questioned, Roswaal drew in his chin and gently caressed Ram’s peach-colored hair as she changed the bandages around his wounds.

Roswaal: “First and foremost, it is crucial to understand the situation, aaafter all. Explaining the circumstances and the other matters can come aaafter the sun has set, but that is not the case for the tomb.”

Garfiel: “Ah, that’so, the sun’s going down soon. Won’t be so simple once that happens. Alright, I’ll take up guiding for ya.”

Standing up, Garfiel placed his cup onto the chair he’d been sitting on and turned to face Subaru and Emilia. Looking at the two whom the talk revolved around, but had been left out entirely, he slanted his head and opened his mouth to bare his fangs,

Garfiel: “Don’t look so dumb. If you don’t wanna become «like the rampaging Hoikoro from yesterday» or something stupid like that, we better get going.”

Subaru: “Wait, wait, wait! We’re not following the conversation at all. I wasn’t even done talking to Roswaal in the first place, you know. At least let me finish that before...”

Ram: “His wounds have opened. Changing his bandages and letting him rest is the priority now. Barusu should do as Roswaal-sama instructed, and head to the tomb up ahead.”

Subaru tried to put up a fight against Garfiel's forcefulness, but that was intercepted by Ram's commanding voice. She faced him with her usual cold gaze, and placed a hand on the bed,

Ram: "Calm down, let us talk once night comes. Roswaal-sama isn't going to run away or anything like that. But if you don't visit the grave before sundown, something is going to run away."

Subaru: "I've never heard of such an energetic grave in my life!"

While scratching his head in resignation, Subaru felt Emilia's gaze piercing into the side of his face. Her eyes were flickering with feeble emotions, and she seemed to be leaving it up to Subaru to decide what they should do. To stay here and finish their conversation with Roswaal, or to be swept along by his will and be led to the Tomb by Garfiel.

—The answer has been decided.

Subaru: "I understand. We'll go to that grave place. It's necessary, isn't it? We'll certainly have you properly answer our questions once we get back."

Roswaal: "Sooorry, that the situation has become like this. Ooonce night falls, we can discuss all sorts of things, muuuch more thoroughly."

Hearing Subaru's opinion, Emilia relaxed her shoulders, and Roswaal nodded with satisfaction. Garfiel and Ram also seemed to accept it, and the two of them began to move onto their respective tasks. However, before that, Subaru said "Just one thing", raising a single finger.

Subaru: "Before heading to the grave, there's something I want to ask you."

Roswaal: "Mmmmm I don't really mind? If it's something I can answer simply, you can go ahead and ask me anything."

Subaru: "Well then, I'll take you on your word— Rem, have you heard that name before?"

Pretending to change the topic, Subaru pronounced the vital question. On hearing Subaru's question, the first to react was Ram. But, it was not an answer he had hoped for. When the name entered her ears, Ram angled her head as if she had heard an entirely unfamiliar term. As Subaru's hopes dropped, Roswaal quietly mumbled the name over again in his mouth.

Subaru: "...Well?"

Roswaal: "Umuuu Sorry, but it doesn't sound too familiiliar. I get the feeling it sounds similar to Ram's name but, maaaybe if it was mispronounced..."

Subaru: "Is... that so. No, that's all. If you don't remember, there's nothing. Nothing you can do."

Turning his head to the side, Subaru accepted that answer.

Ram and Roswaal's reply had shattered the faint expectation in Subaru's heart. To Rem, they had been the two people whom she had spent the longest time with, for whom she would have given her life, and whom she had admired and loved. And they had forgotten her. Taking in the reality of this fact, the air within Subaru's heart settled. And he soberly acknowledged it.

—That in this world, the only one who could remember her, was himself.

Emilia: "Subaru, are you alright?"

With a worried voice, Emilia softly touched the end of Subaru's sleeve. Savoring the gentleness of the tip of her finger, Subaru, not wanting to let her see the darkness on his face, closed his eyes, then forcibly lifted his head.

Subaru: "I'm alright. It's not like I had any special expectations. I more or less knew it would be like this— What I must do, one way or another, I already have that resolve."

Emilia: "En. Let's find a way. I will help too."

Emilia nodded at Subaru's determination, and pledged her unreserved support. As the heart that had been shattered recovered in her gentle regard, Subaru shrugged up his shoulders.

Subaru: "When Rem wakes up... my love won't be wholeheartedly directed at Emilia-tan anymore... won't you get jealous?"

Emilia: "Subaru's feelings for me, if it diminishes, then maybe... But it won't be like that, right? My share and Rem-san's share, you've already said you have them all properly planned out and everything..."

In response to Subaru's flirty banter, Emilia made an unexpected retaliation. Scared witless by that retort, Subaru couldn't utter another word out of his mouth, and her face only slightly blushed, and said with a soft smile,

Emilia: "Let's go, Subaru. I want to let Ram meet Rem-san soon too."

Subaru: "A-aah, yeah. En, that's right."

Even if Ram could not remember, it would be a reunion with her twin sister. Would that reunion call back memories, or send some shockwaves to the lost love they once had for each other?

Even such a fragile hope, he will cling onto it so long as there was still meaning.

Ram: "Barusu."

As Emilia followed Garfiel out of the room and Subaru turned to follow as well, he was stopped by a call from behind. Looking over, it was Ram who quickly approached him. While taking into her hands the replacement bandages for Roswaal's wounds, she came close to Subaru's side.

Subaru: "What is it? If you're planning on some bandage play, after we leave you can have Roswaal all to yourself..."

Ram: "Only Emilia-sama is to enter the Tomb. Barusu must never enter."

Ignoring his joke, Ram's incisive tone crushed Subaru's attitude aside.

Ram's voice was lowered, and had told him in a volume that even Roswaal could not hear. Seeing Subaru's furrowed brows, just in case, she said it once more.

Ram: "—If you do not wish to be ensnared by the deranged will of a Witch, do not, under any circumstances, enter the Tomb."

She repeated it once again.

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—The air inside the Tomb was frigid and clear, and, quite literally, a cool otherworldliness accompanied the atmosphere that greeted Subaru.

A step, every step he took rang out an echo from the soles of his shoes, and, regardless of whether he had wanted to or not, asserted his presence in this place. But even so, the sound of these footsteps gave him an unexpected sense of calmness.

—Because in the darkness which did not even allow him to see a few meters ahead, in the Miasma in which his very own existence was in called into doubt, even this sound had become a consolation to him.

Unaware of where he was, the walls which had been his only source of reference had long disappeared. Walking on and on, had he almost reached the end of his path?

Subaru felt the illusion that he had stopped still.

But the sound of his footsteps refuted this. Within the certainty of the resonance of these footfalls was Subaru's very existence: the reality of his steps was guaranteed, and relying on just that small consolation, he continued onward. How much time had passed, it was impossible to tell in the darkness. Even his thoughts became vague, and his throat, which had already given up on calling out, froze. Walking on like this, exhaustion did not come to him, but because of this, the sensation of his limbs began to blur as well.

Regardless, he walked on. He must walk on. He must not give up. He forbids himself from stopping. Walk, continue walking. Even crushed under the weight of his baggage, he must clench his teeth and walk on.

Otherwise, how would he ever face her—

???: “—I see, so that is the core of your greed. Very interesting indeed.”

A sudden voice rang out, and just as abruptly ended, to be lost forever into the falling of the curtains.

The unimaginable darkness which stretched on no matter which way he turned, in an instant, became bright as day, and the narrow stone corridor transformed – to be wider than the ends of the world. The earth piled beneath his soles snuffed out the sound of his steps, and an air of filth which, above anything, brought nausea to his chest, sprawled throughout.

Completely different from the world up to now, was an ancient ruin befitting of reality — A scene which he felt he might have seen before he entered the Tomb, panned out, and Subaru lost his words.

In front of him, someone suddenly approached. That is——

???: “Apologies for such a ludicrous welcome. I didn’t intend it to be like this, but no matter what, this body is a thing of Greed, after all. The desire to know is... impossible to escape.”

Pure white, like a field of the first virgin snow, was the first impression of that girl.

The long hair draping over her back shone like the reflection of snow in a daydream of pristine white, and the few patches of skin that were showing were just as translucent, and beautiful. A radiance of wisdom lighted up her eyes; she wore on her body a simple ink-black dress, and the display of the two colors adorned the polar extremes of her beauty.

Anyone who had eyes would probably be captivated by such beauty — But instead, what gripped Subaru’s entire body was an overwhelming horror that he had never felt before. Even the sense of pressure he had felt on his first encounter with the White Whale, could not compare to this.

Before the speechless Subaru, the girl shook her white hair, and narrowed her eyes, and then, as if understanding him, nodded lightly.

???: “Excuse my rudeness. I haven’t even introduced myself. It was so very rude of me, please accept my apologies. Because I haven’t interacted with anyone for a very long time, I haven’t recovered my form, it seems.”

Unlike the tone of her voice, the girl’s expression barely changed as she softly shook her head. Then, looking at Subaru, who had been frightened into silence, the girl held a hand over her chest in a sign for him to calm down.

Echidna: “My name is Echidna. But you may know me best as the one called the Witch of Greed?”

Arc 4 Chapter 10 - Thirst for Knowledge Incarnate

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 10, Chapter 2 “The Road to the Sanctuary”, Parts 4-6

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#)

—Since they left the house where Roswaal was recovering, about fifteen minutes had passed.

Garfiel: “We’re here. It’s called the graveyard but it’s jus’ a lame ol’ grave.”

Saying this, Garfiel jerked up his chin to point at an old ruin on the verge of the Sanctuary. Constructed from an assembly of stones, the architectural style was primitive, and quite far from the impression of anything magical.

It is unknown just how many years had passed since it had been built, but from the cracks that littered the face of its walls, and the remarkable density of the sprawling ivy, it must have been something from over a century ago.

The entrance of the ruin was in line with the forest, and most of the building was engulfed into the trees, making it impossible to guess the true size of the structure with a single glance. If this was the burial place of the Witch of Greed, then perhaps it could be thought of similarly to a great pyramid of the original world.

Subaru: “A powerful person wanting to sleep in a large tomb; this is the same for all ages, and in all worlds, huh...”

Touching his chin and ruminating on these thoughts, Subaru tilted his head to the grand scale of the building. Being someone who lives in the moment, Subaru wasn’t all that interested in what people would think of him after his death. But then again, the fact that he wasn’t an important enough person to leave any real trace in history, probably contributed to the development of this view. Anyways,

Emilia: “It’s good that we got to the grave, but what are we supposed to do here?”

Standing next to Subaru, Emilia looked up at the ruins, and asked Garfiel this question with a puzzled face. Subaru had the same question as well, and directed his gaze onto the back of the blonde youth guiding them here. In response to this, Garfiel clacked his canine teeth as he looked back,

Garfiel: “You can hear the details from that bastard Roswaal after you get back. So fer now, what I want Emilia-sama to do is just to get inside.”

Emilia: “All I have to do is go inside? Don’t I have to do something once I’m inside?”

Garfiel: “Now the sun’s still up. Even if ya get deep inside the Tomb, the Trial won’t start. Ya got no preparations or anything, and first you gotta check out whether you have the Qualifications.”

Subaru: “Wa—wa—wait, wait a second! You’re jumping all over the place. Trial or preparations or Qualifications, there’s no explanations at all!”

Cutting in front of Garfiel, who might decide to forcefully push Emilia inside, Subaru called out to his responsibility to explain. But Garfiel only showed the irritated face he had already shown so many times in this last hour, and wrinkling up his nose,

Garfiel: “Yeah who cares, what’s the problem? Go in, and afterwards when you get back to Roswaal you’d understand everything. If ya make me explain all that stuff, I’ll make a mess of it and ya’ won’t understand a thing.”

Subaru: “It’s like you’re forcing us to sign a contract without reading its contents here, there’s no way in hell we’re going to do something like that. If you’re bad at organizing words, then just answer my questions one-by-one properly.”

Garfiel: “Uugh... Yeah, whatever. I’m stuck with ya ‘til sunset, so make it short.”

Slightly spreading out his arms, it seems Garfiel swallowed his proposal. Relieved that they were finally able to get some discussion going, Subaru wondered what he should ask first — So then,

Subaru: “This is the Tomb... Meaning the Tomb of the Witch of Greed, is that right?”

Garfiel: “That’s what I heard. Actually, I got no idea whose bones’re buried here. This place is the grave of the Witch of Greed, ‘least that’s what the guys at the village told me.”

The rather half-assed reply gave Subaru the feeling that something was out of place, but he gulped down this sense of incongruity for now. Then, picking up on some words from his earlier remarks... Two terms that seemed to be of particular importance were Trial and Qualification.

Subaru: “The Trial that will start inside the Tomb, what is that? I have to admit... from my experience over these past few weeks, I don’t have a positive impression of that word at all²⁷.”

Garfiel: “Calm down, being tested and all that, I don’t like it either. So, ah, the about the Trial... I don’t know any details.”

Subaru: “Oy—”

Garfiel: “Don’t get angry, I’m not playin’ aroun’ here. Just, I know it happens inside the Tomb. And those who can’t clear this Trial, won’t be released from the impasse of the Trial grounds.”

Subaru: “Release... who?”

Garfiel: “The ones who possesses Qualifications. Guys who’re qualified can’t get out of the Trial grounds. Long as the Trial isn’t completed, the Witch’s desire to possess will not let go.”

It was a flimsy answer, but Garfiel didn’t seem to be distorting the topic on purpose. Having digested the contents as best he could, he had said exactly what he understood. But still, if his statements didn’t answer anything on-point, it’s probably because his own understanding was vague in the first place.

However, connecting up the fragmented answers from just now, Subaru managed to form some kind of an understanding of the current situation in his mind. So, the answer he got from combining the scattered pieces was,

Subaru: “Only those who are qualified may enter the tomb, and if a person with Qualification cannot clear the Trial, they cannot get out of the Sanctuary... Is it like that?”

Garfiel: “Ah...? Somethin’ like that... I guess?”

²⁷ Note by SummaryAnon: the “Ordeal” talked about by Petelgeuse in Arc 3 uses the exact same Kanji (試練) that is translated as “Trial” here.

Subaru: "I thought I digested a lot but still it's still pretty useless..."

Twisting his neck, Garfiel, who probably still didn't understand, gave back this unreliable reply. Reserving his attitude for now, Subaru turned to Emilia beside him. Taking in Subaru's gaze, Emilia voiced her conclusion on the matter, which was,

Emilia: "Earlier, when I entered the Sanctuary, my consciousness suddenly died out... Was that, what this is?"

Subaru: "That was the barrier, and when she passed across the range she fainted? Well, Otto and I were all good and healthy..."

Garfiel: "That's probably 'cuz you got no Qualification."

Just as Subaru understood the answer to the reason behind Emilia's sudden collapse, Garfiel interrupted, pointing one finger at Subaru, and at Emilia with another,

Garfiel: "Emilia-sama, bein' a half-elf, has the qualification. But, Subaru, bein' a straigh' up pure-blooded human, doesn't have the qualification. So y'can go in and out freely. But, y'can't take the Trial."

Subaru: "Wait, wait, hold on. So then, considering those lines, is it something like this?"

Holding his breath, Subaru organized his thoughts. Then, recalling their conversation on his first meeting with Garfiel, and as he guided them to the Sanctuary, Subaru noticed it.

Subaru: "The ones who can take the Trial are half-elves... no, wait, half-bloods between humans and Demihumans. So that means the people living in the Sanctuary are all like that?"

Garfiel: "—Aah, I didn't mention this yet did I—"

Listening to Subaru's answer, Garfiel nodded looking satisfied, and blinked.

In the next moment, opening his eyes, his pupils had turned gold, and thin like those of a carnivorous beast. The tips of his canine teeth grew, and the nails of his raised claws sharpened like blades.

An illusion of his small body getting larger — Rather, it was no illusion. His short blonde hair had grown so much that it covered his back, and the same golden hair grew on his exposed arms and legs, covering up everything.

Garfiel: “I also got a whole lot o’ those blood left in me. Atavism’s²⁸ my specialty.”

Subaru: “...Wooooow. Can I snuggle in it?”

Racking his brains searching for a way to hold back his excitement, Subaru stuffed his hands into his armpits to conceal the shaking of his fingers. But that request had to be canceled seeing Garfiel had already returned to his original shape. Having witnessed Garfiel’s shapeshift with her own eyes, Emilia gasped in her breath, and took a step forward,

Emilia: “So, after all, this village is a gathering of Demihuman species...”

Garfiel: “More accurately speakin’, it’s a collection of mixed-bloods between human and Demihumans. For th’love of it, all sorts of races o’ people like that’re gathered here. I’d say that Roswaal bastard has a Demihuman fetish or something.”

Emilia: “So that’s why Roswaal said something like that. That for me, this place is...”

Saying so, Emilia placed her hand on her lips and sank deep into thought.

For Subaru on the other side, this information wasn’t very light to take in either. In any case, this meant that the people of this place, even though the details may vary, all had this one thing in common with Emilia. Emilia’s past, of being shunned, and rejected, perhaps they could understand that pain.

To her, perhaps that may just be licking old wounds. But, if there were others who could support her in this way, what would she feel about that? He knew her scars, and wanted to caress them, but Subaru, never having experienced the same pain, could not possibly know how to heal them without opening them up instead. All this had haunted his mind.

²⁸ In biology, an atavism is a modification of a biological structure whereby an ancestral genetic trait reappears after having been lost through evolutionary change in previous generations. So basically, Garfiel’s transforming to a bestial form, as one of his ancestors was a beast (probably not to be confused with Demihuman).

Subaru: “That’s an unexpected flow of things, but I understand the circumstances of the village and the qualification now. So then... the problem is with the Trial. You said you don’t know the contents, but at least know that is going to happen after sunset, right?”

Garfiel: “Yeah, that’s the thing. I don’t know the specifics either. Only that you’re here to check if ya qualify, at least. If you came here at night, the Trial would start, and that’d be the real deal.”

Pointing to the ruins with his thumb, and nudging to Emilia with his chin, Garfiel revealed their current purpose. Nodding to what he had just heard, Subaru gazed up with his mouth open, at the Tomb which was waiting.

Tangled in dense, festering ivy, the thin darkness of the sickly air beckoned, waiting for them. The term Trial only served to deepen this solemn impression, elevating it in his thoughts to something more than an expedition into an old ruin. And, more than anything, that he might possibly be sending Emilia into a place of danger — This fact, was unbearable to Natsuki Subaru.

Subaru: “Sorry, Ram. Looks like I’ll be going against your warning a lot sooner than I thought.”

Garfiel: “Y’said somethin’?”

Subaru: “Suddenly getting Emilia-tan to venture inside gives me so much anxiety it breaks my heart. So first, for scouting and sacrificing purposes... Shouldn’t Garfiel rush in first?”

Lifting up a finger, Subaru made his suggestion. Garfiel looked blank for a second, and then gave a broad smile and once again slapped his laps while making a dry sound with his throat, and,

Garfiel: “Isn’t that normally the place where ya say «I’ll go!» to show off?”

Subaru: “I do want to say it, and I do want to show off quite a bit, but if something happens to me, the probability of me surviving is way too small, so I think you’re more suitable for that. Seeing you can crush the ground with a stomp, you can probably come back alive pretty easily. You’re the strongest, after all.”

Garfiel: “Uh? W—well, I am the strongest. Don’t know ‘bout the Trial or anything, but no matter what kinda danger falls out, I’d be like «Penipeni never yields» and all that!”

What exactly he was holding on to was unclear, but Garfiel was in a good mood, rubbing himself under the nose, and there was no need to pour cold water on that, so Subaru didn't say anything. But then, that good mood quickly evaporated, and Garfiel went on "But then",

Garfiel: "T'bad I can't go in. 'S cause of my contract or somethin'."

Subaru: "...Contract?"

Garfiel: "Yeah, it's annoying as hell. Besides, shouldn't be me doin' this."

Kicking the soil with his foot, Garfiel declared this with a click of his tongue. He didn't seem to be joking around or anything, so apparently it was a fact that he could not enter. As to what would happen if he violated the agreement — That was not a question he could ask in front of Emilia, considering how important promises were to her.

Anyways, now that the situation was blocked in every direction. Letting Emilia go alone was out of the question, but the Scout Garfiel plan was dead. Then, in that case, there was only one choice remaining.

Subaru: "I'll go look for Otto so can you wait for a bit?"

Emilia: "Within the time you do something like that, the sun would go down— It's alright. I will go in."

Just as Subaru was trying to get another sacrifice, it was gently rejected by Emilia. As if her mind was now prepared, she glared at the entrance of the Tomb, while lights of vigilance gleamed within her violet pupils, wary of what might arise inside.

She too, judging from the sound of Trial and Tomb of a Witch, must have guessed what unsettling things might be taking place within. Carrying the same concerns and anxieties as she did, yet to lack even the strength to hold her hand, wouldn't that be far too pathetic.

Subaru: "Ok just a bit inside... No, just near the entrance, but I'll just go in a little bit and check, how's that...?"

Garfiel: "I think it's better if ya don't? Subaru ain't got the qualifications. If ya go in without bein' invited by the Witch's Tomb, you'll end up just like Roswaal."

Subaru: "Like Roswaal... You mean that guy's injuries, are because he went in there?"

As the image of Roswaal's bandage-covered body resurfaced in his mind, Subaru tried to press back his astonishment as he looked up at Garfiel, who crossed his arms and nodded in confirmation,

Garfiel: "Well it won't be like that for any unqualified dumbass that wanders in there at night. It's only 'cus it was that guy, tha' you got someth'n' like that. I wouldn't be surprised if a normal guy without qualifications went in there and got ripped in half."

Subaru: "Those injuries weren't inflicted by anyone, so that's what he meant..."

Roswaal's roundabout statement finally made sense. When he said earlier that he wasn't wounded by anyone in particular, he had been referring to something like that.

But then, another question arose. Why did Roswaal enter the Tomb?

—That he himself was unqualified, he must have known that.

Subaru: "...I better go check inside first after all."

Leaving the doubts about Roswaal for later, Subaru lowered his head as he made this conclusion.

Hearing his answer, for an instant Emilia and Garfiel looked stunned, before,

Garfiel: "Oy oy, were you listenin' to me? It'd be dangerous if a dumbass without qualification goes in. Roswaal got like that at night-time, but even if it's noon ya won't be much safer."

Emilia: "Yeah, it's dangerous, don't do it Subaru? If I go, it'd be alright. I was never thankful for it, but being a half-elf has its uses too, I guess, so..."

Subaru: "I'm glad you're worried about me, but,"

Casting a gentle gaze on Emilia, who was tugging on the end of his sleeve, Subaru softly picked off the fingers which were holding onto him,

Subaru: "If we calm down and divide up our roles, isn't this the natural conclusion? Going inside is dangerous, that's the same for both of us. What we know so far just means that I might be in slightly more danger. So next we should be looking at what each of us can do."

Emilia: “What we can do?”

Subaru: “If something bad happens inside, I won’t be able to heal Emilia-tan. Unless Garfiel turns out to be that kind of insanely surprisingly guy, and happens to be an amazing healing magic user, then it’d be a different story.”

Garfiel: “Wounds, mostly you can just rub spit on ’em and it’ll be good, right?”

Subaru: “Judging from the suspect’s testimony... it’s pretty much like that. Since either of us have the possibility of getting injured, I’d want to keep the healer Emilia-tan safe as an insurance.”

Taking a sidelong glance at Garfiel, who had said those words proudly, Subaru tried to persuade Emilia. Emilia seemed somewhat shaken by Subaru’s argument, but, deciding that she could not give ground on the important part, continued with “But”, shaking her head from side to side,

Emilia: “Major injuries... or even a life-threatening wound, I won’t be able to treat it. Puck isn’t responding either, so there’s a limit to what I can do. Roswaal has settled down now, but...”

Subaru: “Well, those wounds were pretty dangerous ones, huh... But still, try to believe in the slipperiness of my survival skills. I think I rank pretty high on the resilience index of this world, you know?”

He smiled at Emilia, who was not letting go; only, this time, his reply did not sound like he was joking. In fact, it’s rare to find someone as bad at giving up as Subaru. If he were given an infinite number of chances to keep trying, no matter how many times it takes, he would probably keep trying.

No matter how many times his heart is broken, and crushed, he will keep struggling in search of the answer he was seeking.

Because that, is Natsuki Subaru’s—

Subaru: “Then what if I make you a promise? Then you won’t have to worry anymore. I promise, I will return to Emilia-tan’s side, and I will never leave you.”

Emilia: “——Ok.”

Holding out his pinky finger, saying it almost teasingly, he received an unexpectedly favorable reply. Like the stunned Subaru, Emilia held out her pinky as well, and slightly tilted her head,

Emilia: “Um, what do you do with this finger?”

Subaru: “Eh? Uh, we tangle up each other’s pinky fingers like... Uuuooooouu, Emilia-tan’s fingers are super thin and white and cute...!”

Their fingers tangling up, Subaru was moved by the unexpected contact. Then, following the violet pupils waiting for the next prompt, he quietly cleared his throat, and,

Subaru: “Pin-ky-pro-mise. Liar-turns-into-a-pin-cushion.”

Emilia: “Pinky promise!”

Their pinky fingers separating at the same time, in this way, the promise between Subaru and Emilia was sealed. This time, it was a promise made upon an understanding of how heavy promises were to Emilia. It was no longer possible to treat them like he did before, when he had taken them so carelessly.

Subaru: “So, I’ll just take a quick look inside. Basically, I’ll keep calling out while I’m looking around, so make sure to keep calling back to me from the outside so I don’t get too lonely.”

Garfiel: “Son of’a... Sometimes I can’t tell if yer a badass or a wimp.”

Subaru: “I’m a rather careful person. But in the end, I’m breaking Ram’s advice after all...”

Muttering the second half of that sentence in his mouth, Subaru apologised to the girl with peach-colored hair in his heart. The deranged will of a Witch — What she had said was a disturbing term, and one he did not want Emilia to hear. Because surely, she would insist on going in by herself, with an even firmer attitude.

Emilia: “Subaru. If you feel there’s something dangerous, you have to come back right away.”

Emilia held her hands in front of her chest, and saw Subaru off with a worried gaze.

And in return, Subaru shot her an original thumbs-up with his pinky finger raised, sparkled his teeth in a smile, and took his step forward — turning toward the Tomb.

Crossing over the ivy under his legs, he concentrated his sight on the absolute darkness that lay several meters beyond the entrance. The grave was filled with silence, and for now, there seemed to be no sign

of begrudging voices, or atrocious creatures lying in ambush. Still, on the other side of that darkness, what could be awaiting him, was truly, in every sense, unknown.

Subaru: “Eeeeh, screw it. «If you don’t venture into the tiger’s den, you won’t get the tiger’s cub», right? Not that I need a baby tiger or anything!”

As a fluffy fur-enthusiast, he did have the desire to pet a baby tiger one day, but it was not something he would take any risks over. Anyways, Subaru, apparently influenced by Garfiel, cheered himself up with an idiom, and making up his mind, he stepped inside the Tomb.

And, the moment he stepped onto the cold surface inside,

Subaru: “——Eh?”

There was a mysterious feeling under his foot. Astounded, Subaru looked down and lost his words.

——The floor had disappeared.

Subaru: “Wa—wait... That’s just way too...”

——Early for the flag to be recalled.

The footing he had expected to step on did not exist, and there was not a single thing to support his body as he tilted forward. The hand which he quickly extended out could touch neither the wall nor the floor, and so, Subaru’s body was sucked into the darkness beneath his eyes——

Subaru: “AaaaaaaaAAAAAH——!?”

Deeper and deeper, he fell through the endless abyss.

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——Then, it was around ten minutes after waking up at the bottom of the abyss.

Walking around in the middle of a seemingly never-ending darkness, at the end of his path, Subaru found himself in front of a lonely girl. Now, in answer to her questions, Subaru told her everything that lead up to here.

Subaru: “So that’s how, falling down after all sorts of things happened, and then walking around feeling hopeless and a little hungry, I stumbled into you... Satisfied?”

Echidna: “En, satisfied indeed. It seems you are a person who’s even surpassed my expectations.”

Covering her mouth with the back of her hand, the girl let out a quiet laugh that sounded like “kukuku” as she noticed Subaru watching her with a guarded look.

Sizzling energy was building up in his legs as if he was readying himself to dash out at any moment, and he opened and closed his hands as if preparing to seize her.

But naturally, Subaru’s clumsy assault plan was...

Echidna: “There’s no reason to be so cautious. And besides, surely you yourself can tell how little of a chance you have if you go up against me? Bravery and a fool’s courage are easily mistaken for one another, and yet are quite different things.”

Subaru: “Sorry, admitting defeat doesn’t really suit my personality. And when you say there’s no need to be so cautious... Considering I’m standing in front of a person who calls herself the Witch of Greed, is it even possible to follow that advice?”

Echidna: “I see. You really are as you say. It was my bad.”

As she received Subaru’s agitated reply full of rebellion, the girl – the one named Echidna, did not alter her attitude. Rather, with tremendous ease, or perhaps finding the powerless Subaru’s dogged attitude amusing, her own attitude was one which transcended even the shifting of dimensions.

Almost like reading a manga, it was as if she was looking down on a sketched-out character with eyes of a completely different dimension. To her, Subaru had never even been standing on the same stage as herself in the first place. It was precisely because of this, that Subaru regarded her with the greatest caution.

A person emitting an oppressive aura that surpassed even that of the White Whale. The one going by the name of the Witch of Greed. To what extent was all this real, was an irrelevant question. What was relevant, was that she was a person who was not to be taken lightly, whose overwhelming existence could be recognized even by the likes of Subaru. However, as cold sweat emerged all over Subaru's forehead, she sent him a playful glance,

Echidna: "Alas, to be treated so cruelly really hurts my feelings. As you can see, I am only a meek and gentle girl, you know? If a boy looks at me with those eyes, it's not like I wouldn't get any ideas."

Subaru: "You aren't talking about the girl who's got death flag written in big red letters on it, are you? Just so you know, ever since I got here, my caution sensor's been acting up like crazy."

After having tasted death so many times since coming to this world, Subaru had acquired some sort of an ability. Even though his deaths are still piling up in spite of this ability, his constant desire to avoid that experience again is forcing Subaru to incorporate more and more vigilance into his consciousness.

And according to that, the level of danger this girl posed was no less than when he was standing in front of Petelgeuse. Although,

Echidna: "It seems we won't be able to talk properly this way. It can't be helped— In that case, how about this arrangement?"

Saying this, Echidna softly raised her right hand in front of her face. Subaru gulped down a breath at this gesture, and immediately after, the girl snapped her fingers with her raised hand. A faint sound rang out — and the world transformed before Subaru's eyes.

The cold stone space of the bottom of a crypt vanished, and panning out in its place was a prairie of green grass swept by the wind — And, on top of a small hill,

Subaru: "Wha—!?"

Echidna: "Instead of playing in a place like that, how about here?"

Laughing at Subaru's amazement as he looked all around, on top of the hill, Echidna — Sitting in one of the chairs surrounding a white table, showed Subaru a seat opposite her own, and pleaded for him to

come. With no idea what just happened, Subaru hesitated as he came up to her. Neatly placed on the table were steaming cups of tea. Seeing Subaru staring at her silently,

Echidna: "Don't worry, there's nothing dangerous inside. I can take a first sip if you prefer. Although, if you suspect whether a Witch can't be poisoned, then it wouldn't prove a thing."

Subaru: "...I'm beat. Since coming in here, all my common sense just keeps getting overturned. What happened just now? You can use spatial transition magic as well?"

Before this, Subaru's experience of spatial transition magic had been at the hands of Beatrice. With her hands, she had thrown Subaru out of the Forbidden Library and launched him all the way into a livestock barn in Arlam Village.

According to Julius, this magic was a lost art, but if the person in front of his eyes was a Witch, then it would not be such a surprising thing.

Echidna: "Spatial transition... oh, Yin magic. No, this is your misunderstanding. That magic has a lot of disadvantages. I'm not fond of it so it's not something I'd use. This now was just a small trick. I have some degree of freedom here. Because this is my Citadel, after all."

Subaru: "Your, Citadel...?"

Furrowing his brows at Echidna's words, Subaru looked all around once again.

The wind-swept grasslands seemed to be endless, and in all directions there appeared to be nothing beyond the horizons. In reality, whether this empty landscape actually existed was another matter, but it was truly a fantastical sight.

Noticing this, Subaru gulped down his saliva and then shrugged his shoulders with a smile on his face,

Subaru: "Unfortunately, I can't see a castle or even a hut anywhere. What, is your Citadel being rebuilt right now or something? Or did they repossess everything except your table and chairs because you can't pay back the loan?"



Illustration from Volume 10, coloring by Xarlasar ([source](#))

Echidna: “Fffhaha! You really are funny. In front of me, there are very few people who could throw such impudent retorts, except other Witches like myself. Surely, after my death, I never thought there would be an increment in that number.”

As if the number of times Echidna could remember herself laughing at a joke was something that could be counted on one’s fingers, adding Subaru to that list seemed to bring her great joy. But on the other hand, Subaru’s face sank as he caught a phrase which could not be missed from her words. Just now, she surely said this — “After my death”.

Subaru: “If it is true that you are the Witch of Greed, then you should be dead if I remember correctly. I came here to visit your grave, after all.”

Echidna: “Oh, in that case I sincerely thank you. If you wish to bring me some flowers, then please place it near the entrance. I am a person who is not fond of alcohol, so if you want to make an offering then something sweet would be appreciated.”

Subaru: “So, there’s a culture of offering in this world too, huh... Sorry, but I didn’t bring any local produce and I forgot to buy the flowers. Please be satisfied with my smile.”

It was a smile of flowers blooming in profusion — The poisonous types of flowers, though. As Subaru was showcasing that, Echidna purred pleasantly. She then brought the cup resting on the table to her lips, and, taking a sip, she went on,

Echidna: “I’ve never had a chance to drink tea so happily even when I was alive. Just as I thought, there are things to look forward to even after death. New discoveries are inexhaustible.”

Subaru: “You know, this conversation between you and me being a thing in itself is already really weird... Damnit, I’ll drink it. I’ll just drink it!”

Acting so cautious and on edge in front of a person who had no guard up started making him feel stupid, so Subaru, as if plundering it, snatched the cup from the table and gulped down its contents in a rush.

It was neither water, nor tea, nor black tea, but had an inconceivable taste. It was not unpleasant, though.

Echidna: “Drinking up something a Witch gave you; you must be quite courageous.”

Subaru: “Hah. Having come all the way here, how can I be frightened now? First of all, if you wanted to kill me, then in the next panel I would have already been in cinders. So, I shouldn’t be so cautious about a cup of tea.”

Swinging his hand, he placed the emptied cup down on the table with “Thanks for the treat”, and continued,

Subaru: “It was neither good nor bad but, what kind of tea was this?”

Echidna: “Considering it was something formed out of my Citadel. If I put it into words, it’d be my bodily fluid.”

Subaru: “What the hell did you make me drink!?”

Subaru jumped up knocking his chair away and struggled to vomit out the liquid he just drank. But, she only softly giggled “kukuku” at Subaru’s dramatic overreaction.

Echidna: “That was unexpected. I didn’t think my appearance was that bad.”

Subaru: “However much it may be the body fluids of a beautiful girl, I don’t want to drink it without being prepared first! And even if I was prepared, I don’t want to drink anything described as bodily fluids! I have normal fetishes, you know!?”

He had no property of being excited by saliva or sweat, at least he thought.

Although if that was Emilia’s or Rem’s, he thought it might not be too bad, but he quietly hid that in his heart, and went on,

Subaru: “Crap, I can’t vomit this out—— Hey, this isn’t bad for my body or anything right?”

Echidna: “Don’t worry. It is easily absorbed by the body without obstructions. It is bodily fluid, after all.”

Subaru: “You aren’t really saying something good, stop doing that face!”

Seeing Echidna’s slightly bragging attitude, Subaru winced. And Echidna, to whom Subaru was voicing his vehement objection, only tilted her cup with a refreshing expression, and went on “Anyways”,

Echidna: “You really are an intriguing character. The fact that you are standing in front of me normally is proof of that.”

Subaru: “What, you’re too much of a beautiful girl so normally other people’s eyes collapse when they see you or something? I’ll say this first, I feed my eyes on who I consider to be the most beautiful girls on a regular basis. So even looking at you I don’t have many opportunities to think of you as a that cute of a girl.”

Echidna: “No, when normal people stand in front of me, they vomit. It’s funny, right?”

Subaru: “What’s so funny about that!?”

Right from the beginning of their conversation, there had been nothing but unsettling words popping out. Subaru took another look at the girl sitting in the chair.

Her hair and her entire body were white like snow. Her black clothes looked almost like she was in mourning dress, and a remaining hint of youthfulness gave her beauty a color of bewitching glamour. He mused in his thoughts about how a beautiful woman in funerary clothes could have a certain magical charm, but her never-disappearing aura of oppressiveness kept making him regard her existence as a menace.

Echidna: “So——”

Then, looking up at Subaru whose vigilance had not dissipated, she placed her emptied cup on the table as well, and, tracing her finger on the edge, she went on,

Echidna: “Talking on like this would be a refreshing pleasure for me but... It wouldn’t be so for you, would it? I think there must be something you want to say, or want to ask, isn’t there?”

Subaru: “...Yeah there is. That’s right! Being swallowed by the atmosphere I had completely forgotten, but that’s right. You are... No, actually before that, where the heck is this? Is this really inside the Tomb?”

For Subaru, this was connected to the place he fell into not long after he stepped into the Tomb.

He would have readily believed that the gloomy place from before was the bottom of the Tomb. But now, having been invited to a prairie like this, even that felt doubtful. To that question from Subaru, Echidna softly stroked her own white hair with her hands, and,

Echidna: "That question was half-correct and half-incorrect. Your body is surely inside the Tomb, but your mind is in my Citadel. To put it into words, this is inside a dream."

Subaru: "A dream...? But I don't remember your face so much to see you in a dream."

Echidna: "You are inside a dream, I could say, but it does not have to be inside your dream. This is my Citadel—— So, it is inside my dreams. A space similar to this one... Don't you know it?"

To Echidna's pursuit, Subaru held his breath. He then slightly shook his head,

Subaru: "Wha, what is your basis for saying something like that..."

Echidna: "I have no assured proof. But, somehow or another, I just felt it. The attitude of someone who looks away from something you know; I just felt like that yours resembles the behavior of a person like that."

Subaru: "...It's true, that I don't know. But, what you're saying is not wrong either."

It was not a severe way of putting it, but to Subaru, it felt like her words were an impeachment. Echidna's words were not mistaken, but Subaru's reply was no lie either.

When he was told that he was inside a dream, Subaru, while he was surprised, also comprehended it easily. It was as if this feeling was well-known and understood by his heart already.

Why it felt like that — He could not find the reason even searching through all his memories, though,

Subaru: "I'll accept that this is inside your dreams for now. So then, how do I get out of here?"

Echidna: "To wake from a dream, one either wishes to wake up, or is woken up externally. However, even if someone tries to wake me from the outside, my body is no longer present, and it is quite difficult to wake yourself from someone else's dream. So, you can't wake up until I feel like letting you go, and decide to wake up, I think."

Subaru: “—! Then, are you actually...”

Subaru shivered at Echidna’s simple words.

Her Citadel, the meaning of that word now carried a shape of vivid reality. Subaru’s captured soul was now in her palms. The deranged wills of a Witch which Ram had spoken of — The truth of those words swelled in his mind.

Subaru: “Not planning on letting me leave...?”

Even though he was exercising the greatest caution, he was throwing words which may enter him into a fatal rift with the Witch. The fact that if she revealed her true nature, he would have no chance against her, was well understood. And then, to the question Subaru posed, she spilled out a small sigh,

Echidna: “No, not really. I will let you go if you want to go back, you know. I was not the one who called you here, it was you who came by yourself, after all.”

Subaru: “What are you doing to my nervousness? Mr. Serious is not breathing, you know?”

Echidna: “Mr. Serious, unlike you, is not standing in front of me. Maybe he’s vomiting under the shade of a tree somewhere?”

In front of Echidna’s smoothly spewed venom, Subaru felt sapped of all his strength. In the end, what was she trying to do by coming into contact with him?

It had only been a short time, but even after their conversation he had no grasp of her character at all. Although, for a person referred to as a Witch, it was not surprising that it would not be possible to understand her so easily.

Subaru: “Anyways, if you can let me go, then please let me go. There’s probably a girl who’s waiting and getting worried about me. If I had the time to drink your body fluids, I’d rather go back to that girl, so she won’t be so worried.”

Echidna: “That’s fine with me, but is it fine with you?”

Subaru: “Fine with what?”

Echidna: “To go back when you are right in front of me, that is. An opportunity to have a conversation with the Witch of Greed, it’s not something that people other than yourself could get even if they tried.”

This being said, it was the first time that Subaru understood the meaning of her words and taken them into his focus.

Yes. It was. He had only been focused on her menace so far but had overlooked the most important thing. If she was the Witch of Greed, if she was really the existence which had borne this name in life, then,

Subaru: “You... know the answers to, the things I want to know?”

Echidna: “You are asking me, for the whereabouts of knowledge— Are you?”

In response to Subaru’s wrenched out words, once again Echidna laughed with “kukuku”. Laughing, this laughter which felt like it was her happiest yet, inflicted the sense of oppression upon Subaru more strongly than ever before.

The atmosphere distorted, and the ambiance of the endless grasslands suddenly began to collapse. The sky cracked, the prairie burned up, and the world beyond the horizons started to decay.

Feeling a non-existent tremble, Subaru hastily stretched out his hands toward the surely existing table. But the moment he touched it, it scattered as if changing into sand. Then,

Echidna: “Just as I thought, you are an amusing being.”

Lifting her face, the scenery around Echidna deteriorated, and a bizarre pattern started to cover over the world. A shadow was expanding, extending out arms and legs that stuck and clung onto Subaru’s entire body.

In revulsion, he tried to desperately escape, but the collapse of the world had already spread very close to the two of them. The scaffold for escape did not exist. And just so, the world gradually lost out,

Echidna: “If you want to exchange questions and answers, then this space is plenty enough. To know what you want to know. Your desire for such a thing— Or rather, your Greed, I do approve of it.”

What remained between them, was just the space between the chairs in which they were seated. It was a distance close enough to touch if he only stretched out his arm, a world in which they shall sit upon their chairs and have their talk.

The world outside of this had already disappeared. The bottom of the darkness to which his footing had been lost seemed to have no end. Probably without a joke, it would not be possible to come back if he were to fall. As a chill ran down Subaru's spine, seated on her chair, Echidna seemed to be in a good mood.

She clapped her hands, and gazed into Subaru with her shining eyes,

Echidna: "Come now, what would you like to hear about? If it is anything I know, then I would answer to anything. Is it about the Witch of Gluttony, Daphne, who had created god-forsaken beasts, to save the world from hunger? Is it about the Witch of Lust, Carmilla, who had granted emotion even to those who are not human, to fill the world with love? Is it about the Witch of Wrath, Minerva, who punched and healed every person, out of grief for the world filled with conflicts? Is it about the Witch of Sloth Sekhmet, who drove the Dragon away, beyond the Great Waterfall, just to rest? Is it about the Witch of Pride Typhon, who kept on judging the guilty with the innocence and ruthlessness of a child?"

They sounded unfamiliar — Or rather, they were the enumeration of a history which should no longer be existing in the current world. Instilled with the massive amount of information, Subaru could not utter a sound. In front of him, Echidna was still laughing.

Echidna: "Is it about the Witch of Greed Echidna Echidna, thirst for knowledge incarnate, whose vestiges even now linger posthumously in this world, desiring all wisdom there is?"

Pointing to herself with a finger, she said as if with self-ridicule, and went on with,

Echidna: "Or... the Witch of Envy, who destroyed all of these Witches and made them her food, and turned the rest of the world into her enemy—— Is it about her?"

Arc 4 Chapter 11 - Prideful, Slothful, Wrathful

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 11, Chapter 5 “The Witches’ Tea Party”, Part 5

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Complete](#)

In the space where even his footing was uncertain, before an emptiness where falling meant inevitable death, there was nothing to distract his attention away from there.

For in this moment, the only subject occupying Subaru’s consciousness was the girl in front of his eyes — the Witch with white hair and white skin, black clothes and black eyes. That sense of overwhelming presence, of menace, that transcendent entity was of an entirely different level than all other living things.

All of Subaru’s insignificant existence, his eyes, his heart, and his soul, were being toyed and tangled upon the tips of those unseen fingers. In the face of truly inescapable horror, people often seal-in emotions such as these.

Unable to breathe. Unable to feel his own heartbeat. Not even the breaking of a cold sweat, or even a blink, could proceed without her permission. There, was absolute isolation.

Echidna: “Oh dear, I may have overdone it with the intimidation. Even back then, whenever I take an interest in something, I’d end up running my mouth too much. A Witch’s nature is a troublesome thing.”

Suddenly, still seated in her chair, Echidna seemed to notice how her speech had overheated and took up some self-reflection. But still, he could not recover from the traumatizing darkness emanating from the Witch in front of his eyes.

No, the sense of oppression he had intentionally ignored up to now, now that he truly recognized it, would not leave his mind again. The friendly exchange between them had evaporated. Subaru could no longer see the girl in front of his eyes as a girl anymore. For her true nature was that of a Witch.

Echidna: “When I was alive, this sort of thing happened every once in a while. It was just like this when the royalty of the various nations came to me, seeking to borrow my wisdom... But I suppose you can no longer look at me without being guarded now.”

“My my”, shaking her head as if trying to say, Echidna gazed into Subaru with her black pupils. Shaken by the sight of his own expressionless reflection in the black of her eyes, Subaru wavered, and just the same moment, she smiled.

Echidna: “In that case, maybe you’ll like this idea?”

Subaru: “———Eh!?”

An abrupt change came.

Smiling, she whispered something to Subaru as he furrowed his brows to show his non-understanding. Then, watching as her smile dissolved into the darkness, Subaru gasped, and the moment he blinked——

Little Girl: “Whatcha looookin at-?”

Subaru: “...Haa?”

Little Girl: “Well stop staaaring at meee.”

Swinging her legs around as she said this, the little girl sitting in front of Subaru puffed up her cheeks in a pout.

With dark-green hair coming down to her shoulders, it was a little girl with apple-red cheeks. Her hazel-colored skin in her white one-piece dress matched adorably, and her childish cuteness scatters freely about her surroundings. And, particularly distinctive, there was a blue flower-shaped hair clip on her hair.

No matter how you look at it, it was a harmless, innocent little girl—— Now sitting in the place where Echidna had just been, staring back at Subaru.

Subaru: “Ah, eh, huh? W-wait. E—Echidna...? Where the hell did she go?”

Little Girl: “Dona? Dona must somewhere around here buuut, who are you supposed to beee?”

Subaru: “M-me? My name’s Natsuki Subaru. I wasn’t invited here or anything, I’m just someone who got lost, drank some tea, and was heading back... but then the owner of the house suddenly disappeared which left me in a pretty difficult situation...”

Little Girl: “Ehhhh. Theeen, I’ll call you Baruuu~.”

It’s hard to feel hostility toward something so cute, and even though it didn’t quite fit the situation, Subaru gave this frank self-introduction. Hearing this, the little girl smiled happily, which made Subaru’s heart all warm inside despite the circumstances.

Regardless of how messed up things had become, the moment Echidna disappeared it was as if the pressure had been released. If he calmly considers all this, perhaps the little girl before his eyes was just like him, having been kidnapped from who knows where.

One way or another, maybe now he’d be able to escape with this little girl’s help – Even though he wasn’t too sure how much strength she could lend him. He raised up his face and,

Subaru: “Ok, anyways let’s think of a plan to get out of here while the big bad ghost isn’t home. But considering there’s not many places to step on... First, maybe just tell me your name, little missy...”

Little Girl: “Say, Baruuu, are you a baddieeee-?”

Subaru: “if you could tell me that then at least... Wha—?”

Reaching out his hand, intending to show his sparkling teeth, Subaru furrowed his brows.

The little girl in front of him swung her legs, which weren’t long enough to reach floor, and she rocked back and forth in her chair while childishly muttering “Beeecauuuseeee~” impatiently pursing up her lips,

Little Girl: “I’m askiiing are you a bad man, or not a bad maaan. So are youuuu-?”

Subaru: “By their very nature, all humans are creatures who sacrifice other things to survive. Therefore, perhaps from the moment we are born into this world, we are sinners. But, even so, we still live our lives. Knowing that even as we are sacrificing, something more valuable can be built upon that sacrifice... Even though I think this kind of philosophical discussion isn’t really something a little girl can understand, is that what you mean?”

Little Girl: “Uuuml heard it but I don’t really understaaand. Weeell, okaay, if I just cheeeck~.”

Toward Subaru, who looked confused, the little girl looked even more confused. Saying this, she held tight onto Subaru’s extended hand. From the small palm completely wrapped up inside Subaru’s, he felt a tactile softness that was unique to the hand of a little girl. And feeling this gave him a renewed resolve, that no matter happens, he will bring her safely out of this place.

Subaru: “Even though I’ve been around Petra, I’m still surprised I’m so fond of kids. I used to think they’re too noisy and all but...”

Little girl: “—OnlythroughpainandsufferingcanthegUILTYbecleansedofsin.”²⁹

Subaru: “Hah?”

Suddenly, the little girl quickly muttered something in a whisper.

Unable to understand, Subaru’s raised up one of his brows, and felt a light impact. As if his arm had been lightly tugged, there was then a strangely liberating sensation, as if being released from a heavy burden.

Wondering what had happened, Subaru turned his head to look all around him. Everything was just like it was before, and nothing changed in the world. The space that permitted Subaru and the little girl to sit facing each other was still without wind or sound or sensation of any kind.

Sitting in the chair in front of him, was still only the little girl swinging her legs.

Only, in her hand, she was holding a man’s severed arm—

Subaru: “—!?”

Little Girl: “Doesn’t hurt soo, you’re not a bad maaan, I’m so relieveeed.”

Noticing the abnormal turn of events, Subaru looked at his own right arm — at the right side of his body where his arm should be, he saw the reality of the exposed cross-section of his shoulder where his arm had been twisted off.

²⁹ Interestingly enough, this is written in nothing but Katakana to give it a feeling of oddness, which is conveyed in English by sticking all words together.



Illustration from Volume 11, coloring by Setowi ([source](#))

Pain, blood, none of it was there, before he noticed the deed. The bone and arteries wrapped in pink meat, all exposed in the cross section, reminded him of the edible meat lined up in a butcher's shop.

That is, aside from the unacceptable surreal reality that it was happening to his own right shoulder.

Subaru: "Oo, aaaaaaaah!!!! A-arm... My arm aaaah!?"

Little Girl: "It doesn't hurt riiight, don't yell so loooud. If you flail around too much, we won't be able to put it baaack."

Subaru: "Y—yo—youu!? Ripping someone's arm off, what, what the hell are you saying! G—give it back! Give it back!"

Holding the exposed cross-section of his right arm shrieking, Subaru jumped right at the snorting little girl with a demon-possessed look on his face. Yanking his right arm back from her hands, he hurriedly tried to stick it back on.

Not that a severed arm can be reattached by sticking it on, but such a thing didn't really occur to Subaru at this moment. But,

Little Girl: "—Sinwillbecomeawedgewhichallowsnoescape."³⁰

The moment he heard something being uttered from the little girl's mouth, Subaru's posture collapsed. Rather, more accurately, the legs that were supposed to step onto the floor shattered like fine glass-craft from the knee downward.

Losing his right arm and both his knees, Subaru's body fell forward from the momentum. And receiving him, was the lap of the little girl still sitting in her chair. The little girl gently received the falling Subaru, and like a mother holding her beloved child, she caressed the terrified Subaru in her arms.

Little Girl: "You aren't a bad man at aaall, but you still think of yourself as a sinner. You are a gentleee and good chiiild-. Poooer thiiiing, you muuust be in paaain-."

³⁰ Same as before, this is written in nothing but Katakana to give it a feeling of oddness, which is conveyed in English by sticking all words together. This is the same line as in LN Volume 11 and Anime Episode 34, so I've opted to use the superior Anime subtitle translation here. Funnily enough, this line also appears in a Shop Special (extra side story content), bonus points if you know which.

Subaru: “J—just... w—wha—what... a—are you...”

His right shoulder and his shattered legs did not bring him pain. Nor were they bleeding.

Incomprehensible. An unacceptable existence. The existence of the little girl before him, the one a moment ago he had thought was a subject of protection, was now despairingly distant from that impression. Hearing Subaru’s question, the little girl tilted her head,

Typhon: “Typhon is the Witch of Pride you knooow~.”

Subaru: “Pri...!?”

The impactful statement once again stopped Subaru’s thoughts in their tracks. Be it anger or horror, these concepts were completely blown away.

Just a moment ago, Subaru had been in front of the Witch of Greed Echidna. Then why was he now suddenly faced with the Witch of Pride? Witches who should have already been annihilated, and died long ago—

Woman: “—Huuu. Guess it’s my turn. Haaa, can’t get out of it.”

A languid voice came from above him, while Subaru’s petrified throat was still trying its best to groan. Subaru had only blinked his eyes. The color of the world did not change, and his arm and his legs are still missing. But even so,

Woman: “Haaa, so heavy. Shouldn’t you be a bit lighter without the arm and legs? Huuu, that’s a man for you... Man or woman, wouldn’t existence itself be better off as one big useless blob?”

The one Subaru’s body was leaning against had changed from the little girl named Typhon to a different woman entirely.

The woman this time had strange magenta-colored hair: a beautiful girl with a lazy impression. Her skin and lips were sickly pale. Her downcast, half-closed eyes gave off a sleepy or, rather, generally unenergetic impression, and, as if even breathing was a chore, a depressing atmosphere was present around her. And although she was wearing loose black robes, obvious stains and rips littered all across the fabric as if birds had walked all over it. Looking down at the silent Subaru, she sighed lethargically.

Woman: “Haaa, you’re pretty unlucky too. Being played around by Echidna, then Typhon and me... HUUU, meeting three Witches one after another, haa, only that dummy Flugel or that stick-swinging Reid have done something like that before.”

Subaru: “You’re, a Witch... as well? Just like the little girl just now, and Echidna...”

Sekhmet: “Haa, I’m Sekhmet. HUUU, it’s such a bother but you could call me the Witch of Sloth, or not if you don’t want. Haa, not that I’m asking you to call me one way or another it’s so confusing anyway. HUUUU, I get tired from talking so can I just stay quiet from now on?”

Subaru: “Oh give me a break. I’m gonna lose my mind here. If no one tells me soon, I can’t even be sure of my own reality anymore. Please, just tell me what’s going on right now.”

Subaru used his only surviving left hand to grab hold of her robe, and raised up his head to look at Sekhmet. Sekhmet seemed to find that gaze a bit bothersome, and sighed, then turned down her eyes same as before,

Sekhmet: “Your right arm, haaa, and your knees are gone. HUUU, it was Typhon, wasn’t it? It’s because that child doesn’t understand other people’s pain. Haaa, she’s still that innocent and merciless child after all this time. Huu, the poor child. Haaaa-.”

Subaru: “My, arm and legs... Th-they can grow back right?”

Sekhmet: “HUUU, for me that’s really... Aaa, but that’s alright, haa. It’s pretty bothersome for me too, huu, I’ll leave it for the child after me and go back to sleep. Haaa, breathing’s such a bother. If I could take in a lifetime’s worth of air all into the lungs at once, then I won’t have to breathe again for the rest of my life, don’t you think? Haaa-.”

Subaru: “If you do that your lungs will explode and we’ll die right? But compared to that, my situation here...”

Still in her languid demeanor, Sekhmet’s off-beat proposition puffed Subaru’s head full of smoke. As if trying to say, “Please take this seriously”, Subaru tried to plead to her.

Girl: “—Just now, did you say you wanted to die in front of me?”

He heard a murderous voice saying.

At this point, although it's no longer the first time Subaru had been surprised today, he still couldn't react with anything other than being stunned stiff.

Again, the person in front of his eyes changed. The Witch flaunting the full, dense head of hair had disappeared, and replacing her was,

Subaru: "...Breasts?"

Girl: "—Tch! W-where are you staring at, where!?"

Trying to look up from the soft lap at the other person's face, Subaru's vision was blocked by large protruding breasts that were obscuring her face.

The sensation of the lap that was bearing the weight of his body, unlike Typhon's and Sekhmet's, now had a meatier feel to it, and honestly seemed to be full of the dynamism of a feminine body.

While literally experiencing this with his entire body, Subaru was suddenly lifted up by its owner's arm — With a single hand, Subaru's body had been easily hoisted up, even though his weight was still no less than an average adult woman's, even after losing his arm and both his legs.

Girl: "Look at the other person's eyes when you're addressing them, eyes! Really, men are always like this, unbelievable!"

Saying this as her anger was puffing out, it was a beautiful girl with swaying golden hair. Starting with a short skirt, she was wearing loosely fitting clothes over her body, and her stature while sitting down seemed to be on the short side. But even so, her large breasts gave her a full-bodied impression, and gave the whole situation a somewhat titillating atmosphere... Well, only the totally healthy kind, of course.

Then, glaring at the hoisted-up Subaru with rage-filled eyes, she brushed aside her hair in front of the frightened Subaru,

Girl: “Missing your right arm. Missing your legs from the knees down. Not bleeding or in pain... Looks like you’ve been punished by Typhon! That child... She did something so inconsiderate again, it’s just going too far!”

Looking at Subaru’s painless wounds, her blue eyes were clouded over by intense emotions. With impulsive words, and an indignant attitude, her every act was instilled with passion, and all the while she was behaving like this, there were tears pooling faintly in her eyes.

Subaru: “A-are you crying...?”

Girl: “Not crying! Just angry! That’s right, I’m just angry! At Typhon who caused all these wounds and just left you here! At the world that made that child do such an outrageous thing! And at all the people fighting and harming one another making this world hell, at the senselessness of it all!”

Her furious voice cried out, with such power that it messed up her hair as she pronounced this.

Then, lifting up her arm, she suddenly tossed the dangling Subaru up into the air.

Subaru: “Eh?”

Girl: “So I absolutely will not permit it! Pain! Conflict! Wounds! How can I remain idle in front such things—!!”

The next moment, with a speed that broke the wind, the girl dashed out and struck her fist straight into Subaru. His face being suddenly injected with such incredible speed and power, Subaru’s body was quite literally blown away like a leaf. But,

Subaru: “Pffu—!?”

Expecting to continue being blown away for quite some time, he suddenly arrived at the end of the world.

Echidna had actually trapped Subaru within a world of limited space, so after being launched flying by the power-packed punch, he had only managed to fly for a short distance. The impact against the invisible wall rolling through his entire body, having splatted in the middle of the air, Subaru turned his eyes back around. And there,



Illustration from Volume 11, coloring by Xarlasar ([source](#))

Girl: “—All will be well! Don’t ever think of turning back!”

Leaping, as if in pursuit, the girl rained punches onto Subaru’s body while it was still in the middle of its falling animation-sequence.

The endless flurry of punches striking into every inch of his body, Subaru’s flesh was sandwiched between the wall and her fists. The sounds of impacts ceaselessly penetrating Subaru’s body, its power went through him and into the walls, and began shaking the very world to its core.

Kneaded by the impacts, knocked up and down left and right, Subaru could no longer tell which was which as his mind turned blank. In the field of his vision, through the dance of the incoming fists, perhaps no longer wishing to conceal it, there was the face of the girl covered in a flood of tears. Droplets glimmering as they scattered through the air, just when Subaru wanted to complain “I’m the one who should be crying here...”, his face was already turned away by a punch. Not knowing when the incessant hell would end —It suddenly ended unexpectedly.

Girl: “Let my fists revive the world! Let my anger cleanse the world! My wrath, and my healing fists are my reply—!”

The next moment, the world shattered. The wall that Subaru had been stuck onto, under the impacts of the girl’s rain of fists — After sensing an unbearable sensation through his clothes, Subaru felt the wall behind him shatter into dust. In that instant, Subaru felt a sense of liberation.

When the rain of fists stopped, he felt something soft. Subaru noticed that he was lying on the ground, in the grassland of the previous world where they had their tea. Sitting himself up, he looked all around in a stupor. Landing gallantly beside him, the girl brushed her blonde hair as she shot Subaru a stare.

Girl: “Right arm!”

Subaru: “Eh!? O-ok!”

Being suddenly called, Subaru raised up his arm, and that’s when he noticed. The arm that had been ripped off his shoulders was now back and perfectly well, all the way to his fingertips.

Girl: “Legs!”

Subaru: “Oooh, things are looking up. I can stand and walk! Look I can do a moonwalk now!”

Just to be sure, Subaru jumped up and started doing a moonwalk for good measure. Watching Subaru sliding across the grass, the girl held her elbow and nodded contently. And it was at that moment, when the swaying of her prominent bust burned itself into his memory.

Subaru: “Y-you saved me, thank you. But, considering the flow of things, you are...?”

Minerva: “I am the Witch of Wrath Minerva! Not that I call myself that!”

Subaru: “You called yourself that just now!”

Minerva: “Don’t, that was no big deal! I will not allow anyone to be hurt in front of my eyes, nor tolerate to see a person wounded! It’s not a deed to be passed on for posterity or anything!”

Subaru: “You’ve totally just marked your own actions as some incredible accomplishment there! You’re not really hearing what other people are saying are you? It’s really hard to communicate with someone like that!”

Flailing his only recently healed arms around to demonstrate his befuddlement, seeing this, Minerva just quickly turned her back to him.

Minerva: “In any case, now that the wounds are healed, there is nothing more for me to do here! Don’t get so much as a bug bite now! That’s a promise with a Witch!”

Subaru: “Even if I go live in a sterilized room that’s not possible is it!? And don’t make promises on behalf of other people! Promise with a Witch or something, wouldn’t breaking it mean some severe punishment!?”

Minerva: “It’s no such thing. But if it ever comes to that... I will heal everyone.”

Subaru: “Don’t say that like you’re going to go around murdering everyone, it’s really scary!”

But the fact remains, Subaru’s body was completely healed.

Her crude healing methods — In this case, true to the description, he actually was healed at the end of all that. Beating someone up in order to heal them, to think that a phenomenon so inconceivable could possibly exist... It's almost like in those old TV series.

Minerva: “—Well.”

Then, the girl who was gallantly walking away turned around.

Her white hair swinging with her motion, and her black dress spreading upward charmingly, all filled into Subaru's eyes. She was tilting her head to the side, quite happily gazing back at him.

Echidna: “To prove that I'm relatively harmless, I let you meet some of the other Witches. So, what do you think? If your attitude could warm up to me a bit now, then waking them up from their sleep would all be worth it.”

Summing up his painful experience up to now, was the Witch Echidna. Seeing her in front of him, Subaru drew in a deep, long breath, before lifting up his head,

Subaru: “You, really are every bit a Witch... No human would think like that at all.”

And, just uttering these words took up the last bit of his strength.

Arc 4 Chapter 12 - A Souvenir from the Tea Party

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 10, Chapter 2 “The Road to the Sanctuary”, Part 6

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Complete](#)

Echidna: “So, the space I worked so hard to prepare was destroyed. Such recklessness... it’s just like Minerva. That girl can be a little... too quick to strike.”

Subaru: “A little...? I think she got to it almost immediately there. That new-sensation-violent-large-breasted-healing-type-loli-*tsundere*. That’s way too many character-tropes stuck together you know!”

Turning his perfectly healed right shoulder, Subaru started blowing this at Echidna in front of him. The sense of pressure coming from the white-haired girl hadn’t changed. But still, her arrangements had not been entirely without effect on him.

Subaru: “Well, I think I’m in the mood for a face-to-face conversation now. Compared to the other Witches, you do seem somewhat more rational... except Witch of Sloth-san, she may be talking nonsense, but I think we can understand each other.”

Echidna: “Well Sekhmet, how should I say this... Of all the Witches, she is the oldest and the most rational. But if you make her angry, she won’t leave anything half-way.”

Subaru: “«Won’t leave anything half-way»... You mean she’s scary when she gets mad?”

Echidna: “Let’s just say, even if we all teamed up, we’d be no match for her. Even if all the other five Witches fought together, I don’t think we would be able to win against Sekhmet.”

Once again sitting in her chair, Echidna explained this, as Subaru cast her a doubtful glance. The image of the lazy girl with long, reddish-purple hair flashed in his mind. With that lifeless attitude, overflowing with inertia, that person was actually the strongest of all the Witches.

Subaru: “By the way, I’ve been meaning to ask... I get the feeling that you’ve been leaving the Witch of Envy out.”

Echidna: “—Let me just give you one piece of advice when you’re talking to me.”

Remembering the Witch whom Echidna had never once named, Subaru asked her this question, to which Echidna only smiled and raised up a single finger. Subaru stared at her fingertip as she slightly tilted her head,

Echidna: “I think of the other Witches as my friends, and I think they are deserving of my respect. I have a personality with many flaws myself, and having them by my side for so long is an emotional support for me, a salvation. That is why I have been gathering up their souls, without leaving a single one of them behind.”

Subaru: “...I get the feeling that I’ve just heard something that can’t be glossed over, but please go on.”

Echidna: “The one who destroyed these Witches, was the Witch of Envy— Would you yourself be able to smile at the entity that brutally murdered your closest friends?”

Her smile did not change. But its nature had turned. A surge of fear ran up Subaru’s spine, and by the time he noticed it, he was already nodding in agreement with her words. Seeing this, she said “That is so, isn’t it?” as she pulled in her chin.

Echidna: “My, it seems like the mood has spoiled a little. How about some tea to get rid of the bad taste?”

Subaru: “...I don’t have the kind of courage to drink that Dona Tea again. Unless you put some actual tea in there, then I have no intentions of eating or drinking anything in this place.”

Echidna: “To be invited to a Witch’s tea party... Back in my day, it would’ve been a thing to be envied... My, my, I guess people do change, along with the times.”

As if she had already prepared Subaru’s portion, with a look of regret, Echidna filled only her own cup, and raised it to her lips. But if what she said was true, then that tea would actually be her own body fluids. Then basically, she would be drinking bodily fluids that she herself had produced...

Subaru: "I heard something about rabbits... They eat their own poop and keep going like a perpetual-motion machine or something."

Echidna: "It is kind of humiliating to be lumped together with them... isn't it? Unless, this can be taken as a roundabout way to tell me you wish to hear about the Great Rabbit?"

Subaru: "Great Rabbit?"

Subaru tilted his head. It was a word he had heard somewhere before. Searching within his memories, he remembered where he had heard it. Indeed, it was while he was riding on the back of a galloping Patrasche, down on Lifaus Highway.

Subaru: "They are Witchbeasts that line up shoulder to shoulder with the White Whale... Right? The Great Rabbit, and the Black Serpent?"

Echidna: "They're Daphne's bad legacy. Even she herself found them a bit too hot to handle. Setting the Black Serpent aside for now, you have heard of the White Whale and the Great Rabbit wreaking havoc all over, have you not?"

Subaru: "By the way, since we're talking about the White Whale, thanks to my efforts it's already been slain. Thanks to my efforts, that is."

Pointing a thumb at himself, Subaru inflated his nostrils with a boastful look on his face. And, hearing this, for the very first time, Echidna's black eyes opened wide with a look of surprise.

Echidna: "Ehh, is that so? That is, impressive. Just by your looks, you don't seem to have an arm for swords, or a gift for magic... But you moved those around you quite well indeed."

Subaru: "It's a pretty depressing feeling when you knew right away that I didn't defeat it on my own...! How do you know I didn't just launch at it and kill it?"

Echidna: "Whether it's the White Whale or the Great Rabbit, it's hard to imagine that there could be humans who can slay them single-handedly. In my time, the only one who could have done this was Reid."

Once again, Subaru raised his brows at the name he didn't know. Noticing this, Echidna let out a "Hmm" as she brought a finger to her narrow lips.

Echidna: "Were they not passed on to this age? I had thought his achievements were quite remarkable. To put it lightly, he was the only one in the world who could cut down twelve fully-grown dragons all by himself."

Subaru: "No, well, it's just that my understanding of common knowledge, or actually anything related to what people normally know is kind of shallow. That guy sounds pretty incredible though."

Echidna: "—Reid Astrea. Sword Saint was the title given to him, but is it not around anymore?"

Listening to Echidna's words, Subaru's mind steadily put the pieces together. Astrea — that was Reinhard and Wilhelm's family name, a name held by the current Sword Saint and Sword Demon, the name of that indomitable clan beloved by the Sword God. Then, its first generation must have been Reid Astrea.

Subaru: "Ok, I think I got it. It's still around, Sword Saints. I don't know what generation it is now, but the current Sword Saint's my bro. He's a monster who probably wouldn't lose to the ancestor-sama you knew."

Echidna: "That's quite a way to describe to a friend... I might say that, but knowing how unconventional Reid is, I can't blame you. Anyway, now we're going to talk about the Great Rabbit, I suppose?"

Subaru: "Uhh, nah. It's not that I'm not interested in the Great Rabbit or the Black Serpent, but..."

As much it as seemed that Echidna had wanted to continue talking and show off her knowledge, Subaru thought he should put a stop to that. There was a mountain of things that he wanted to know, but if he were to digest it all at the same time, his brain probably wouldn't be able to keep up.

Instead, it might be better to pick out what he really wanted to know and pursue those topics thoroughly. In that case, the first of the things he wanted to know was,

Subaru: "So uhh, you are Echidna, the deceased Witch of Greed. Is that right so far?"

Echidna: "I had confirmed that right at the start, hadn't I? There's no mistake about it. This place is inside my dreams, and if you wish to leave, you can just say the word."

Subaru: "I appreciate your consideration. So first off, I do have a question..."

Touching a hand to his jaw, he directed his gaze toward the girl with white hair. And being bathed in Subaru's insolent gaze, she raised her hand to her almost translucent white cheeks and said, "What would that be?" as she narrowed one of her eyes.

Subaru: "I think this is something I should have confirmed with you at the very beginning but... First off, you're dead where exactly? Aren't you frolicking about, enjoying your days and being pretty chipper?"

Echidna: "...Ahh, I see. It's true I hadn't explained that at all. We forgot to touch on it, haven't we? You and me both."

With a clap of her hand, Echidna nodded as if understanding. As she signaled her agreement with her gesture, Subaru only scratched his head wondering what had gotten into him. With the impact of a Witch showing up, and then the Witches' class-reunion after that, Subaru had been too shocked to ask this obvious question until now.

Subaru: "Seeing a ghost inside a Tomb, it'd be good if it was that simple. But after being meddled with so much, I don't think I can just pass it off as all being in my head."

Echidna: "A ghost, I can't really deny that. After all, I am a spiritual body that has lost its physical body. But now, as to why I'm here like this... Well. It is as a counterforce. That would be the most accurate answer, I suppose."

Subaru: "Counterforce...? What kind of... No, actually, maybe «against what» would be a better question?"

Echidna: "You are sharp, aren't you?"

Nodding contently at Subaru's reaction, Echidna softly clapped her hands. Then, turning up to the air, she signed toward the artificial blue sky with a gesture of her hand.

Echidna: "The one who bound me to this place was Volcanica. The Divine Dragon Volcanica. You've probably at least heard of him?"

Subaru: "...That would be the Dragon who signed the Covenant with the Ruler of the Kingdom of Lugunica or something, right? I heard that name in the great hall at the Royal Selection."

Echidna: “Yes, that would be the same Volcanica. By that Dragon’s power, I am sealed here in this Grave. And the reason Volcanica did this was, as you correctly inferred, to serve as a counterforce against the Witch of Envy.”

Echidna’s gaze was calm and intellectual, but when the words Witch of Envy weaved from her lips, for an instant, a dangerous emotion flashed across her pupils. Perhaps that, was the enormity of the chasm between her and the Witch of Envy.

Echidna: “Even now, the Witch of Envy is imprisoned in the Sealing Stone, but her seal is not unbreakable. Nor is Volcanica’s lifespan eternal, and there is no guarantee that the seal won’t be undone if given the chance. There are also quite a few who believe that there is no knowing whether every great change in the heavens and the earth might not be chipping away at the Sealing Stone— That, is why Volcanica left my existence behind.”

Subaru: “As a fighting force to oppose the Witch of Envy, if ever she is resurrected...?”

Echidna: “However, I was not the Witch that Volcanica had originally expected to leave behind. If anyone should have remained, it should have been Sekhmet. The problem was that Volcanica himself disputed with Sekhmet. And, it seems, after she beat him to a pulp, he grew rather wary of her.”

As if casually gossiping, Echidna lightheartedly glossed over the intertwining fates between the Dragon and the Witch, but Subaru, who had been listening, did not laugh.

He didn’t really think that the grudge between a Dragon and a Witch could be summed up so simply like interpersonal relationships. And besides, he wasn’t entirely sure to what extent he should be believing a story about the Witch of Sloth beating the Dragon to a pulp in the first place. Without knowing what to say, Subaru stayed silent. And in front of him, Echidna continued with an “Anyways”.

Echidna: “Myself, the Witch, and the Divine Dragon Volcanica. With the Sword Saint and... the Sage? For the time being, even if the Witch of Envy was resurrected, we should be able to oppose her. At least, that is Volcanica’s faint hope. So, there you have it, the context behind why I am now in this disgrace, after my death.”

Subaru: “So basically, the one who bound your spirit to this place is the Dragon?”

Echidna: “More accurately, it was at Volcanica’s instruction, that the magic of the Mathers bound me here. If you’ve managed to set foot in here, you must at least know of the Mathers? Or perhaps that family name is no longer around...”

Subaru: “No, the Mathers are still around. Roswaal L. Mathers is the lord of these regions where this Tomb is located. And he’s also my employer, or should I say guardian, or should I say a pervert or something...”

Amazed by the profoundness of that man’s potential involvement with the Witch, Subaru wondered just how he should describe Roswaal to her. But, putting Subaru’s uncertainty aside, Echidna’s finely shaped brows trembled. “Roswaal?”, she muttered,

Echidna: “I’m sorry, did you say Roswaal just now?”

Subaru: “Oh? Ah, yeah. Roswaal. What, do you know him?”

Echidna: “It would be strange, if I knew him. After all, I am an existence from four-hundred years ago. If that was the same person who had existed in that same age, then this conversation would’ve taken an odd turn indeed.”

Subaru agreed with her observations, and just when the image of that clown’s face pouting up his lips was emerging in his mind, Echidna said “Now...”, as she raised a finger to her lips.

Echidna: “The Roswaal you are talking about, does he happen to be a someone with long, dark-gray hair? His eyes would be... yellow, I think, if I remember correctly.”

Subaru: “—Nah, in that case it’s a different guy. The Roswaal I know has blue hair, the same color as my jeans, kind of. And his eye color’s different. My guy’s eye colors are mismatched, one’s blue and other’s yellow.”

Relieved that the characteristics are different, Subaru sighed, and suddenly thought of something. Roswaal had told him that the management of this land, the Sanctuary, had been passed on for generations. So then, the Covenant with Volcanica to seal Echidna here must have been passed on as well. If this duty was inherited throughout the generations of the clan, then in that case,

Subaru: “Maybe Roswaal’s name was inherited as well. Occasionally we get girls with really manly names this way, that happens a lot in mangas at least.”

Echidna: “To inherit Roswaal? If that were the case, it would sound like something of a nightmare.”

As if agreeing with Subaru’s theory, Echidna nodded, and shrugged her shoulders, giving off an impression of fatigue. Seeing this unusual change in her attitude, Subaru furrowed his brows. It was then, she said “No...”,

Echidna: “The Roswaal I knew, was a person with a bit of an overly obsessive personality. He was the kind of man who would devote his entire life to fulfill a single purpose, I’m afraid. And if after my death, he had remained unchanged, then...”

Subaru: “Not being satisfied with his own life, he would devote even his descendant’s time too?”

Echidna: “Exactly as you say. Oh my, just thinking of it is a scary thing.”

Even as she said this, Echidna’s lips rose into a smile. In fact, it was exactly like the gaze of a parent who was watching over their naughty child, but surely, Subaru thought, he must be mistaken. Anyhow,

Subaru: “Well, now I understand the reason you’re inside this Tomb, and who’s behind it. For the actual specifics, I’ll ask the modern version of Roswaal after I wake up from this dream.”

Echidna: “You are free to do so... So then, are there any other questions?”

Subaru: “Of course there’s more. Next thing I want to ask about is, the Trial. I was told there’ll be a Trial taking place inside the Tomb. I’d like to know about its contents. And, if you could also tell me the right answers too, please.”

Echidna: “Asking for the questions and the answers straight from the examiner, how ruthless you are.”

Subaru: “A little craftiness never hurt anyone. There’s no reason not to use shortcuts when you can. I’m the kind of person who likes to play games while reading the walkthroughs, you know.”

Because getting killed and having to do it for a second time would be a pain in the ass. But setting Subaru’s random gamer philosophies aside, Echidna closed her eyes as if sinking deep into thought. Then, it was five seconds later when she opened them again,

Echidna: “The Trial, is it?”

Subaru: “Ah, yeah. What kind of Trial is it anyway? If we don’t pass it, a girl who’s really important to me will be in trouble. She won’t be able to leave the Sanctuary even if she feels homesick. And obviously, leaving her behind and going home by myself was not an option.”

The barrier that surround the Sanctuary, if something like that was blocking her way out, then Subaru would have no wish to go outside either. When she passes the Trial, they will go through that barrier together. And he will do whatever it takes to make sure that happens. For instance,

Subaru: “Even by cheating!”

Echidna: “I’m sorry to say this after you got so excited but, I know nothing about the Trial. I am not involved in it. Therefore, I don’t know its content.”

Subaru: “The what!”

His momentum suddenly getting derailed, Subaru let out a yelp. Hearing this, Echidna said “Well there’s nothing we can do, is there?” as she shook her head from side to side.

Echidna: “You do know what this place is, don’t you? It is my Tomb, after all? In other words, this is a Tomb which would have been built after my death. And the Trial you spoke of, it takes place inside the Tomb? Then the Trial within the Tomb must also have been created after I had died. So, there is no way that my deceased self could possibly have had anything to do with them, now is there?”

Subaru: “There’s no way I can understand that kind of rapid-fire logic!”

Echidna: “In any case, I am not the examiner. So, I can’t give you answers about the Trial. If anything, it’s me who should ask you about this Trial. Its contents, the types of questions, the selection of its respondents, and of course, the answers to the questions... My curiosity is endless.”

In her radiant eyes, the pupils of the Witch of Greed shined with the thirst for knowledge.

Sighing at the sight her straightforward desire, Subaru concluded that he would make no progress speaking with her on the topic of the Trial. In that case,

Subaru: “Man, then I feel like there’s not much else I want to ask you.”

Echidna: "...Eh? You're kidding, right? That's impossible. But I am the Witch of Greed, you know? From all corners of the world people have come to me, seeking my knowledge. To be in front of me, with permission to ask anything you wish, you say you have nothing you want to ask me...?"

Subaru: "Well, because you're already dead and you don't know much about what's happened after you died, right? What I want to know is mostly in the present-progressive-tense, so there's no point in asking someone who doesn't know..."

Echidna: "Nonono, let's calm down. It is true that I'm unacquainted the present world, but in exchange, there is almost nothing I do not know about the past. Much has weathered down in four-hundred years, and no longer remain in anyone's memory, or history. Isn't this a chance to learn about them? Just like the conversation with the other Witches earlier. There are things that no longer survive on any record in the entire world."

Subaru: "But, I don't have much interest in Witches. Even if I learn about them, they're all already dead, and there are a lot of things on my mind right now, so that kind of conversation is not really..."

Echidna: "Eeeeeehhh..."

Seeing Subaru really intending to go home, unsatisfied, Echidna, screwed her face into a scowl. It's almost like their positions were completely reversed.

But still, as far as Subaru was concerned, it was the truth. The wrongdoings or noble deeds of the Witches of the past, whatever they were... He didn't really have an interest in such things. Other than that, what kind of useful information he could get out of Echidna, he really couldn't think of any off the top of his head...

Subaru: "Wait, now that you mention it, I just thought of one."

Echidna: "Yes, yes! Very good, that's it. I knew it, there are still things. Ask anything you want. As long as it's something I can answer, I will answer it. Go ahead!"

Already to the point of agitation, Echidna was biting onto Subaru's question not-half-heartedly.

Even if they're called Witches, at the root of it all, it was impossible to erase all traces of their worldly instincts. Thinking this, Subaru remembered something about the Sanctuary,

Subaru: “The residents of the Sanctuary that contains this Tomb, they refer to this place as the Trial or Experimental Grounds. No matter how you look at it, the Witch of Greed’s Experimental Grounds sounds pretty important, and then there’s a barrier that doesn’t allow half-bloods to escape, what kind of experiments are you running here? I was hop...”

Echidna: “—I can’t say—”

Subaru: “...ing I could ask you that.”

However, with a single stroke, Echidna’s expression vanished as she discarded the question. At that unapproachable attitude, Subaru couldn’t help but fall silent. Seeing Subaru’s reaction, Echidna seemed to have noticed the sharpness of her own words, and made an awkward expression with her face,

Echidna: “I apologize for being so rude. But there are also things I cannot say. I can’t answer that question. It’s not that I cannot say, but that I don’t want to.”

Subaru: “...The term doesn’t give off a good impression, Experimental Grounds. But you don’t seem to be denying it.”

Echidna: “I want you to stop there. I do not wish to be held in contempt.”

Lowering her eyes, Echidna rejected any further pursuit of the topic.

The Witch with an overwhelming existence, shriveled her shoulders as she asked this of Subaru. Anyone who heard this, would have had no choice but to give up on any further questioning. Then, what passed through Subaru’s mind instead, was,

Subaru: “Come to think of it, your name... I had heard it before coming here.”

Echidna: “...”

Echidna remained silent. In front of her, Subaru touched his forehead as he reflected on his memories. The name of Echidna, The Witch of Greed. Before coming to the Sanctuary, that name had stolen Subaru’s ears several times.

Subaru: “...from Puck.”

In the loops that started in the Capital, Subaru had been killed by that Great Spirit three times. His most abhorrent and bitter memory was the time the gigantic Puck killed him as he mocked him. That time, in Petelgeuse and Puck's conversation, her name had appeared. On the verge of death, Subaru's consciousness had not understood what it meant, and he had not remembered it again until now.

Hearing Subaru's mutters as he found this memory, Echidna lifted up her face.

Echidna: "Puck...? You don't mean, the cat Spirit...?"

Subaru: "—!? Yeah, that's right. The cat Spirit. Do you know Puck?"

Echidna: "It's not whether I know him... Did he come here? If that's case, just how much does he remember?"

Echidna seemed shocked to hear this unexpected name, and Subaru was just as shocked to see this reaction from her. Echidna, who had been talking nonstop up to now, suddenly fell silent.

Seeing her ominous attitude, Subaru couldn't say a thing. And Echidna, as if sinking into thought again, shut her eyes in deep contemplation. Wondering how to continue this conversation, Subaru turned up his gaze,

Subaru: "—Gaah!?"

All of sudden, in the bottom of his stomach, a searing heat asserting its own existence drew the entirety of his consciousness.

Subaru: "...Uh, ah?"

The tremendous heat felt as if it would burn through his entrails. Groaning, Subaru held his stomach, his legs trembling feebly.

The abrupt, surging pain was beyond anything ordinary. A stomachache would be nothing compared to this mysterious anguish that made him foam at the mouth. Unable to stand, he fell to his knees, and, in the next moment, dropped to the side. Seeing Subaru like this,

Echidna: "Ah, it's finally taken effect."

And, admiring the sight with her cold, unfeeling eyes, Echidna gazed down at him. Slowly, she approached the writhing Subaru, bent down her knees to get closer to his face, and brushed aside the hair over Subaru's forehead,

Echidna: "When you're invited to a Witch's tea party, you shouldn't be putting everything you've been given into your mouth so carelessly— You've learned a lesson now, haven't you?"

Subaru: "You, di... you poison me...?"

Echidna: "Out of the question. I told you, didn't I? What you drank were my body fluids. A part of a fundamentally different existence, a part of a Witch. That, is what you consumed."

Body fluids. Subaru realized he had overlooked the significance of that term in all the conversation that came afterwards. And the consequence, was this state of his current agony. Opening his eyes, he glared at Echidna. All the friendly attitude of before had long evaporated. Just what did she want to achieve by doing such a thing—

Echidna: "I don't want you to misunderstand, I didn't do this out of malice or any ill-will towards you. In fact, I regard your existence quite positively. Letting you drink a part of me is proof of that."

Subaru: "Sp... eak so I can... under...stand..."

Echidna: "To put it simply, I lent you a hand so the dormant Witch Factor³¹ inside you could settle down more easily... or something along those lines."

Subaru: "Witch, Factor...?"

The incessant heat growing in intensity, Subaru used every last ounce of his strength to repeat that word.

—Witch Factor.

That word too, he had heard several times before. There was Petelgeuse. And then there was Beatrice.

³¹ Unclear if it's Witch Factor (singular) or Witch Factors (plural). Best to err on the side of caution and assume one.

Echidna: “You killed an agent of the Witch of Envy, didn’t you? With that agent’s death, the Witch Factor implanted itself inside you... However, there seems to be something else inside you as well.”

Subaru: “That thing, when it familiarizes... What’ll happen?”

Echidna: “Indeed, whatever would happen? Honestly, I am not sure myself. But, compared to carrying around a bomb that blows up who knows when, it’s better to detonate it before it causes anything worse, I think. If we can settle this inside a dream, perhaps it’ll make the undetonated part easier to deal with once you’re outside.”

Listening to that indifferent tone, Subaru felt like his consciousness was about to fade, as light and dark flashed before his eyes in sync with the surging of his pain. But even in this state, Subaru slightly raised his arm, and pointed toward Echidna,

Subaru: “Just now, I thought of something...”

Echidna: “Hm?”

Subaru: “You... The way you talk... is, just like Puck. That cat spirit too, doesn’t care about the mood at all, just goes around with that careless air, goes on like there’s nothing...”

Listening to Subaru’s wrenched out words, for an instant, Echidna blinked in surprise.

Then, with an exaggerated expression, as though she had just heard the funniest joke, Echidna held her stomach as she burst out laughing.

Echidna: “Haha! Hahaha! Aaah, that is quite, a good one! You are fascinating. I really think so. Mmm, mha, aaahahahaha! Is that so, me and Puck? Mmmm, you’re quite right. That would be only natural, of course. I’m probably the only one who he’d take as something like a role model³².”

Subaru: “What, are y—”

Though he wanted to continue his sentence, it was no longer something he could do.

³² This had originally been translated as Echidna taking after Puck, but after consulting two translators (Ice_Occultism and Ringo), that was actually a slight mistranslation.

The pain had set his entire body ablaze, yet it would not deprive him of his consciousness. It had felt as though it would continue forever, and there would be no respite from this anguish, but... the end was already nearing. Though, it was not by overcoming the pain, but rather,

Echidna: "The time for our tryst is almost up, it seems."

Little by little, in Subaru's eyes, the outlines of the world began to blur.

The blue sky, and the little hill in the green grass-covered fields. The two of them, and the chairs surrounding a white table. All these images blended into one, and together, began to fade.

Subaru: "I thought you said it'll only end when you want it to end..."

Echidna: "We have reached the time limit relative to the real world. The Trial you mentioned, it seems it will begin soon. When it does begin, all the functions of this Tomb will be directed towards it. And it won't be caring about the lonely ghost anymore."

Saying this in a lighthearted voice, Echidna caressed Subaru's forehead as he lay on the ground. Watching him unable to resist, or even to react, she laughed.

Echidna: "Now, to return from a Witch's tea party. What toll would you like to pay?"

Subaru: "...Just so you know, I'm broke as hell right now."

Echidna: "Not money. The price is... Ah, yes. You are forbidden to speak of this space to anyone else, how about that? You seem to already have another contract just like it too... It is a small price to pay, is it not?"

What is that supposed to mean, there was no time to even ask that question.

Pressing her finger against Subaru's forehead, she whispered something quietly. Then, sensing a heat coming from the finger that was touching him, in an instant, it spread throughout his entire body. And, incredibly, Subaru was granted an understanding. Of the terms of the contract, and what must not be infringed upon – Thus, this one-sided agreement was sealed.

Subaru: "Doing this, without even asking first...!"

Echidna: “Our conversation and consolidating the Witch Factor. Compared to that, I think this is a very small price to pay. Also, might as well while we’re at it, I will grant you a gift.”

Smiling at the indignant Subaru, another wave of heat passed from her finger to his forehead.

And, the result of this heat was—

Echidna: “I hereby grant you the Qualification to participate in the Trial of this Tomb.”

Subaru: “—!?”

Echidna: “With this, you will be able to take this Tomb’s Trial tonight. Whether you wish to take part is up to you. It is fine if you choose not to. But, if you want to, you could choose to take the Trial in place of the girl who is so very important to you— What you do with it, you may decide as you like.”

The collapse of the world had begun. And little by little, what lay beneath his feet dissolved into darkness. This time, the true end of the world was drawing near.

Then, in the world that was coming to an end, Subaru, still lying on the ground, looked up at Echidna.

Sealing a contract he did not wish to sign, extorting from him a price he did not wish to pay, the girl who was smiling at him without a care in the world — Ah, without a doubt,

Subaru: “—You are, truly, a Witch.”

Echidna: “—Oh, but of course. I’m one wicked sorceress, isn’t that right?”

With that final farewell, Subaru’s consciousness sprang from the dream.

Falling, and falling. Fading, and fading.

Breaking out of the dream, floating upwards,

At last, Subaru’s consciousness — was released from the Witch’s dreams.

Arc 4 Chapter 13 - Roswaal's Intent

Has been cut from the Light Novel Adaptation, would be found in Volume 10

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

The first thing Subaru felt when he woke up was someone's fingertip against his forehead.

Subaru: "Judging from the delicate softness and the really considerate contact, it's Emilia-tan's!"

Emilia: "—Even though you got it right, I got a reeeeaally spooky feeling about it, maybe it's just my imagination."

Opening his eyes, Subaru's field of vision was covered by the palm which was touching him. Through the gaps between her fingers, Subaru got a peek at a fragment of her beautiful face, and he loosened his lips, smiling.

Subaru: "Well, because only Emilia-tan would go to the trouble of taking care of me at a time like this, so I got the feeling it was you. It's not like anyone could actually tell who it is just by the touch of a fingertip, you know?"

Emilia: "Oh, I see. I guess feel a bit relieved now... Your body, can you sit up on your own?"

Subaru: "One way or another... yeah, I'm fine."

Answering with a joke as he woke, Subaru sat himself up from the bed. Briefly looking around at his surroundings, he found himself in an unfamiliar building.

The bedding he had been lying on was crudely made and couldn't compare at all with the beds of Roswaal's Mansion that he had gotten so used to. In any case, Subaru tried to remember what had happened before he lost consciousness.

Subaru: "Up to where did reality end, and from where did the vision begin..."

The Tomb — Setting one foot in that place, and immediately being swept into a state of falling: that was the last thing he remembered about real world. Then after that, his meeting with the girl playing-innocent inside the Tomb — With the Witch of Greed, if a Witch's words could be believed, would have all happened inside her dreams.

It was all too vague. Frustrated by his indecisive memories, Subaru held a hand to his forehead and looked toward Emilia. Beside the bed, seated in a chair, she seemed to be quietly waiting for Subaru to sort out his thoughts. Seeing her there, Subaru began with "Well then...",

Subaru: "There are loads of things I want to ask and talk to you about... But, first there's something I have to say."

Emilia: "En, what is it?"

Tilting her head ever so slightly, Emilia waited adorably, listening — But, her eyes weren't smiling. Under the light gleaming from her clear, violet pupils, Subaru shrank his shoulders,

Subaru: "I'm sorry I made you worry again. I got a bit too carried away there."

Having thought that he should, at the very least, be able to clear the path ahead of Emilia, he had somewhat overestimated his ability.

And the situation, as it turns out, was that on the first step he took he fell on his face. Receiving Subaru's apology, Emilia let out a little sigh through her lips.

Emilia: "You know. I was really really worried. The moment you went in, you let out a shriek and passed out."

Subaru: "Putting the shriek aside for now... I passed out?"

Emilia: "The white of your eyes were turned up, and you wouldn't stop convulsing. We really didn't know what to do. There weren't any wounds, and it didn't look like there had been any strange magic cast on you..."

Seeing Emilia hesitating with her words, Subaru got an idea of how embarrassing his display had been.

So that's what happened... Apparently, immediately after he stepped into the Tomb, when the floor collapsed — or by the time he sensed himself falling, he had already been summoned into the Witch of Greed's dreams. And in reality, Subaru fell asleep the moment he walked in, and basically gave Emilia an uncalled-for amount of worry while she looked on, unable to do anything.

Scouting ahead for dangers for the sake of Emilia — The determination he showed back then was looking really stupid at this point. Thinking that, Subaru scowled up his face in self-loathing, when,

Garfiel: “—Oh? Hey, he's awake isn't he? Lookin' pretty good there, oy.”

Saying this, pushing open the creaking door, the blond youth — Garfiel walked in. Taking a passing glance at Subaru on the bed, he then turned his gaze toward Emilia.

Garfiel: “Told ya didn't I? Nothin' wrong with his body, see?”

Emilia: “...But still, I still couldn't help but get worried. Not knowing why and seeing him suddenly collapsing like that. Even though I've kind of gotten used to it by now, getting used to something like that really isn't a good thing, is it?”

Garfiel: “Hah, c'mon, toughen up a bit. Panicking and getting all teary-faced as soon as y'saw this little buddy go down... Like «yer face's more blue than Aomiguro», as they say.”

Emilia: “Wha—!?”

Listening to Garfiel's thoroughly boorish retort, Emilia pouted up her lips as her face turned bright red. And as soon as he brought that last part up, Emilia jumped up from her chair with a squeal.

Emilia: “I-I wasn't teary-faced! I was worried and panicking, sure, but I wasn't...”

Garfiel: “A-ah, right, right. It's a secret, a secret. Sorry sorry. But, it's not that bad... There's no need to hide it or anything.”

Emilia: “It is that bad... I'm really worried that... if he heard I was going to cry...”

Trailing off in the middle of her rebuttal, Emilia sneaked a side-glance at Subaru. Up to now, Subaru had been silently observing their conversation. In front of her gaze, what would the speechless Subaru say—

Subaru: “Hn? Ah, it’s good, keep going. Please, please, eheheh. Is that so, eh, is that so. Emilia-tan was so worried about me that she was crying... Is that so, eheheh...”

Emilia: “...Somehow, I got a feeling Subaru would react like that.”

Emilia slumped down her shoulders dejectedly. In front of her, Subaru was still breathing heavily with enlarged nostrils. To know that the girl he has a crush on had been worried about him from the bottom of her heart, even if this was indiscreet, he couldn’t hold in his glee.

Seeing Subaru’s immodest indulgence and Emilia’s reaction, on the side, Garfiel let out a “Ohhh so that’s how it is” and then, with deep feeling, muttered,

Garfiel: “This time’s my bad. Yikes, it’s pretty rare. To see me ownin’ up to my mistakes so straightforwardly, ain’t it?”

And, in self-reflection, Garfiel admitted something he’s not all too proud of.

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Ram: “If properly trained, even dogs can exercise enough self-restraint to not eat before being given permission.”

Chilling, it was a voice instilled with such sharpness that one might be cut in half if one were to touch it. Echoing out slowly, there was a pause between each word, but the space in between was filled with such dreadfulness that no room for objection was permitted from the other end.

Ram: “That is to say, following an instruction the way even a dog is capable of, should have been the least you could do.”

“Kuts kuts”, were the high- pitched sound of footsteps striking the wooden floor. The steps had a constant rhythm, walking left and right, back and forth in front of him.

The evenness of the gaps between them reflected the calmness of the footsteps’ owner’s mind, all the while knowing full well that they were mercilessly chipping away at the mental composure of the other person.

Ram: "Now—"

The voice and the footsteps, and those eyes devoid of emotion, all shot toward Subaru—

Ram: "A creature that can't abide by instructions that even a dog can abide by, what do you even call such a thing? Barusu, do you know?"

Subaru: "I'm so sorry I didn't follow your advice—!!"

Toward the small girl standing opposite him, Subaru fell to his knees on the spot and bent his head all the way down as he cried out in apology. However, against the wailing from the bottom of Subaru's soul, girl only slightly tilted her head.

Ram: "«I'm so sorry», did you hear me asking for an apology? Not only did you not hear the question, it seems you didn't hear anything at all so far. I think Ram's advice didn't even enter your ears in the first place, because it's not like it was something you couldn't have understood."

Subaru: "Can you please not use such a roundabout way to express your distaste!? I repent, I totally know I was wrong, but it feels like my heart is getting crushed! A straight-forward scolding would've been easier on me!"

Ram: "It'd be better if you died."

Subaru: "Too straight-forward!!"

Receiving the girl — Ram's merciless rebuke, Subaru hugged his head on the floor. But actually, considering his conduct, he could only receive all her abuse with resignation. He had flat out gone against her especially delivered warning and caused trouble for everyone around him as a result.

Roswaal: "Thaaat's alright. Ram should forgiiive him there. Aaafter all, Emilia-sama must have already given him the exact same lecture, no? Going over it again wooooon't do much good, except making Subaru-kun's masochist tendencies exciiited."

Subaru: "I don't have masochist tendencies. Stepping on landmines just happens to be my natural instinct!"

It was just him not being able to read the mood very well, he was thinking. Seeing Subaru puffing up his chest boastfully, Ram gave up in the bottom of her heart as she let out a deep sigh, and then, without a word, she turned her back to him, to face toward Roswaal.

And Roswaal, shifting his body to face everyone waiting silently by his side as he lay on the bed, continued, "Weeeell then",

Roswaal: "Firiist of all, that you all came back safe is the most important thing. These stumbles before the Trial had sent all kinds of plaaans into disarray. Even though Subaru-kun's action was a nothing but a simple bluuunder."

Having been tossed an all-too-meaningful smile, Subaru crossed his arms and made a small snort. And, as if with a reproachful attitude, Emilia, who was standing beside him, pinched Subaru under his ribs.

Subaru: "Ow. That hurts, Emilia-tan."

Emilia: "Even though I always defend you, today it's Subaru who's been bad... If I had known that Ram had said something like that, I would have..."

...Stopped Subaru from going first, as if trying to continue like this, Emilia's words trailed off. Smiling wryly back at her, Subaru muttered "That's why I couldn't tell you..." in his heart.

If she knew about this warning beforehand, Emilia would never have allowed Subaru to take on such a dangerous task.

But on the other hand, if it weren't for Ram's warning, Subaru wouldn't have made up his mind about trying to clear the way for Emilia in the first place. So then...

Subaru: "Your advice didn't make anyone happy, Ram."

Ram: "Saying all of this was because of Ram, only a dog would do that... No, I should change that to lower than a dog, otherwise it would be insulting to dogs."

Seeing Subaru trying to pass off responsibility, Ram shot back with a look of ultimate contempt. He couldn't help but admire the maid's dissipating venomous attitude. And, at the same time, the other

side probably held a similar opinion of Subaru as well. Leaving the two's irrelevant sparring aside, Roswaal rearranged his legs on the bed, and,

Roswaal: "By the way, Emilia-sama... How did you like the Tomb?"

Emilia: "...With what happened to Subaru, I didn't get a chance look around. But there was a terrible stench in the air, and I felt this unpleasant stinging feeling on my skin."

Emilia furrowed her brows as she put her impression of the Tomb into words. Basically, bad impressions took up most of her overall appraisal of the place. And hearing this unreservedly negative appraisal, Roswaal let out an "Is that so...", and slightly smiled. Then, his mismatched eyes set upon a corner of the room — Towards Garfiel, who had been observing their conversation, leaning against a wall.

Roswaal: "Garfiel. Has the Qualification been confirmed?"

At the word Qualification, Subaru raised his brows, and looked toward Garfiel. The blonde youth roughly scratched his short hair, and revealed his sharp canine fangs.

Garfiel: "I didn't go further than the front of the entrance but... the lights in the Tomb turned on alright. Emilia-sama's got the Qualification, there's no doubt 'bout that."

Subaru: "Lights in the Tomb?"

Hearing something he hadn't heard of before, Subaru tilted his head as Garfiel flapped his hand around irritably.

Garfiel: "There's a bunch of candle-things in the Tomb. While the sun's up, if a guy with Qualification walks into the Tomb, some stuff in there'll make the fires light up. A guy who gets this welcome without any problems will be qualified to take that night's Trial."

Roswaal: "Conversely, if someone without Qualification forces his way into the Tomb, it would be juuust like what happened to Subaru and myself."

Finishing off Garfiel's words for him, Roswaal spread out his arms. It was to show off his body, which was still painfully wrapped in blood-soaked bandages— That is, to show off the punishment for forcing one's way into the Tomb.

Subaru: "I feel like the severity of the punishment is pretty different between what you got and what I got... Compared to just going in like me, what you did must've been quite a lot worse, right?"

Roswaal: "Worse, suuuch as what?"

Subaru: "Illegally peeing beside the entrance or something. That'll really piss off the Tomb manager."

Roswaal: "If that were the case, Subaru would have fallen right where my puddle had been, it seems."

His sarcasm being countered by another sarcastic reply, Subaru showed a disgusted face as he quickly patted himself off all over his clothes. Seeing Subaru's reaction, Roswaal relaxed his cheeks, and said "Buuut", shaking his head,

Roswaal: "The fact that we suffered different damages despite being similarly rejected... I'm impressed you noticed it. It's true, my injuries are quite a lot greater than Subaru's. But, the reason is very simple—"

Emilia: "—Mana... Gate rampage."

Roswaal's words were interrupted by this answer.

Turning to the voice, it was Emilia, who had been covering her lips with her fingers. She was thinking with downcast eyes and playing with the tips of her silver hair.

Emilia: "When I entered the Tomb, I felt a really unpleasant air about the place. It felt like my Gate was being interfered with or something. Maybe because I met the requirements, it decided to let me go... But if it's someone who doesn't meet the requirement, the interference would bare its fangs."

There was a change in the certainty of her words, and little-by-little, her tone became imbued with strength. Emilia lifted up her face, and those violet pupils took in Roswaal's pitiful form.

Emilia: "The interference strikes at its targets through their gates... Which means, the greater the number of gates the person has, the greater the damage they will receive from the interference."

Roswaal: "Perfect answer. With someone like myself... That I didn't blow up is a miracle."

Casually saying something scary again, Roswaal flashed a glance at Subaru with a single eye, and said "It's a good thing you have no talent", rather annoyingly.

Subaru: "So basically, magic users or any talented people would almost die from that. But all I got was loss of consciousness, so it's a good thing that I'm so totally inept as a magic user, huh..."

Emilia: "T-that's true but... describing yourself like that, doesn't it sting a little?"

Subaru: "I've gotten pretty used to knowing that there are things I can't do and things I can't reach. It's alright, I'll just use the things only I can do to show my love for Emilia-tan. For now, how about we start with some rustic love whisperings?"

Emilia: "After the Royal Selection's finished and everything's settled down, maybe I'll consider it."

Subaru: "At least three years later!?"

Even then there's no guarantee whether she will listen... At the cruel Emilia, Subaru shriveled his shoulders. Then, with a "But," he continued,

Subaru: "Putting the qualifications and whatnot aside, a space that kills magic users... I don't know who's behind it, but it sounds like a pretty asshole thing to do... Don't know how else to describe it."

Roswaal: "Considering it has been managed by generations of the Mathers family, the one who assembled the manaaa mechanism must have been one of my aaancestors."

Subaru: "Ah, that's not good... is it. But then, wait... Then doesn't that mean you're a way-too-accurate impression of your ancestors? Like it's reincarnating through Ros-chi's family-line or something."

What if when one generation dies, the next generation gets possessed by the asshole consciousness of its predecessor, and so on and so on like a puppet family-line...

Just the thought of it was too frightening, and Subaru quickly shook his head to put it out of his mind. But hearing Subaru's words, Roswaal laughed as if having heard quite a joke,

Roswaal: "There are families who researched that kind of maaagic, aaah, they have been defeated, and extinguished looong ago... And also, while you could call it a «space that kills mages», there is a more accurate name for it."

Subaru: "Which... is?"

Roswaal: "Simply put— That place is filled with the Witch's Miasma. A nightmarish environment, that passes corrupt Mana through the trespasser's Gate, and drives him to madness. That, is what is caalled Miasma."

Miasma, Subaru furrowed his brows at the appearance of this word, as if searching for a memory of something he had heard before. Indeed, he had heard that word from—

Subaru: "The story of the Witch of Envy... The place where she was sealed, is covered in that Miasma, or something..."

Roswaal: "Yooogu, you know about that, don't you? Weeell, it is a very faaamous story. Even now, the Sealing Stone Shrine where the Witch of Envy is sleeping is covered in Miasma so thick that it distorts everything in one's view. If that Miasma rejects those who do not meet her resting place's conditions, it will invade the minds of anyone it touches, annihilate their flesh, and corrupt their soul, a phenomenon of true and genuine malice. Even the faithful adherents of the Witch Cult who seek to revive the Witch of Envy, are not able to approach it, or so the stoory goes."

Subaru: "Even the Witch Cult guys can't go in huh... Then again, of course they can't. If they can just walk right in and plonk the seal off with everyone watching they'll win, won't they."

The Witch's resurrection — He remembered Petelgeuse, screaming that supreme objective.

Even that madman, single-mindedly crying out his conceited love, could take no direct actions to actually save the Witch. It was probably out of consideration of the fact that his true form was a spirit also meant that he would be powerless in the face of the Miasma.

Roswaal: "Aaanyhow, because of that, the Witch's Seal is made unapproachable by the Witch's own Miasma. And on top of that, if one wishes to approach the Shrine, one would have to be sneak past the watchful eyes of Sage Shaula in the Waaatchtower."

Subaru: "I've heard of that name, the Sage Shaula. That's the second Sage I know of... Flugel, and then there's Shaula."

How did they come to be called by this title, Subaru wondered. Perhaps there was something about them that was different from everyone else? Seeing Subaru's doubts, Roswaal lightly smiled,

Roswaal: "Flugel, you mean, thaaat big-tree Flugel? Whiiile it's true he's also called a Sage, comparing him with Sage Shaula woould be a little harsh."

Subaru: "Why's that? They're both Sages, you shouldn't be playing Sage favourites. I owe Flugel-san quite a bit you know, so don't go insulting Flugel-san in front of me now."

No matter what, that Sage lent him a pretty big hand when they were battling the White Whale. Flugel-san probably never imagined that the tree he planted would come in handy for defeating monsters four-hundred years later.

Whether he'd be happy about it though would be a different matter.

Subaru: "With a tree that huge, the broken off part could probably used for all sorts of things... Well, there's a chance it got blown up by the time bomb though?"

Roswaal: "Iii get the feeling that's not the only brooken thing we'll need to deeeal with. Anyway... Emilia-sama."

Shifting his gaze from Subaru, who had been holding his chin in his hand, Roswaal turned to Emilia, as he this quiet call. Hearing this, Emilia lifted her face, and answered "En",

Roswaal: "To return to the topic at hand, more than anything, it is goooood that you possess the Qualification. That means Emilia-sama may take the Trial of the Tomb. In that case, there is just one thing I have to ask."

Solemn and low, the mischievous tone had vanished from Roswaal's voice. Taking this in, Emilia also looked back with a serious gaze, watching him in return,

Roswaal: "Simply put— Are you willing to accept the Trial?"

As the short question fell into the room, Emilia's pressed together her lips and became silent.

Of course, this was only natural. Whether she had the Qualification to take the Trial had already been confirmed. So naturally, it would be followed by this next question. But,

Subaru: "Before she answers, I just want to ask. The Trial, is it something that she absolutely must take?"

Before Emilia could voice her answer, one step ahead of her, Subaru raised his hand. Hearing this question, at Roswaal's side, a dangerous emotion settled within Ram's pupils, but Roswaal lifted a hand to stop her.

Roswaal: "I thought this was soomethings you would aaask. Without taking the Trial, those with Qualification will not be able to leave the Sanctuary. This much, you must have already heard from Gaaarfiel?"

Subaru: "So I've heard. But, that's not really a reason Emilia-tan must take it, is it? The Tomb of the Witch of Greed is a foul place, there's no knowing what kind of dangerous things could happen in there. Sending an important Royal Selection candidate, Emilia-tan, into such a place, just what are you thinking?"

Roswaal: "Uuumu. Weeell, as fair arguments go, it is a fair arrrgument. If we simply needed someone to take the Trial theeen, there are others who are qualified... If that was all, it'd be just as well if Garfiel diiid it."

Garfiel: "Hah? Me? I'm good with that. I'd challenge the Trial and break right through, it'll be like «Barubarumoa-right-right-left», and I'm passed yeah?"

Like stirring water, Garfiel gestured toward himself with his thumb with a smile that bared his teeth. Seeing how Garfiel only seemed to have heard the second half of what was said, Subaru ignored his simple-minded remarks and tried to focus on the more reliable aspects of his statement.

Actually, it would be nice if the Trial was something anyone can beat, because then there would be no need for Emilia to do it. Then, it'd be nice if someone qualified and more dependable could challenge it.

—In the worst case, having been granted Qualification to challenge the Trial, it'd also be fine if Subaru did it.

???: "—Nyaa, that'd be a lil' problematic."

It was a sudden voice from the entrance of the house that didn't belong to anyone present.

With his back to the door, Subaru jerked around his head in surprise as he heard the unfamiliar voice. Now taking Subaru's gaze, Garfiel, who was leaning against a wall beside the door, slightly waved his hand in front of his face.

Garfiel: "Wasn' me, 's that old hag over there."

Saying so, he gestured with the hand he was waving with toward his side. Setting his sight there, Subaru saw beside Garfiel's scrawny body an even smaller shadow standing there.

???: "Who's an old hag. Never at a loss for words, what a rotten kid I've raised."

With pink, long drooping hair, a tiny little girl said with a very grown-up attitude.

With perfectly formed features, it was a little girl with a cute face. Her age seemed to be around Petra's, about eleven or twelve years old. Her pink hair had waves in them, and its soft texture gave off a light and fluffy impression. Wearing a loose, white robe that grew larger the lower down it got, with long dangling sleeves that left no place for her hands to come out, she had an impish look about her.

Above all, judging from the way she was addressing Garfiel...

Subaru: "Even though I always thought it would show up one day, I didn't think it'd show up here, the loli-granny...!"

???: "Wha's that, I get the feeling I've just been called something totally against my will, or is that just me?"

Emilia: "Umm, I often hear Subaru use loli on Beatrice... So it means little, right?"

Seeing Subaru's astonishment, the little girl looked up at him with a displeased expression on her face.

Just from Emilia's mumbles, her modern-day knowledge was proof of how high her experience-points in her interactions with Subaru had been. Listening to this, Subaru raised up a finger.

Subaru: "Yep, Emilia-tan's correct. More specifically though, it means little children outside of my conquest-range. Combining this loli together with granny, we have what looks like a little girl on the

outside but containing a granny within, completing a miraculous *kyouryoku*³³! Even though I don't really go for lolis in the first place, I do understand the subtleties of the *gap moe*³⁴!”

Emilia: “*Gap moe*?”

Subaru: “A girl who's usually like an awe-inspiring older sister, but in some places really childish and lacking some really common knowledge or just straight-up being easy to trick, would also be considered *gap moe*!”

Listening to Subaru's string of words in rapid succession, Emilia, with “So there are girls like that...”, brought a finger to her lips with an expression as if she was taking this in. While Emilia being unaware of how the characteristics were referring to herself was unbearably adorable, the other person being addressed by these words was looking annoyed,

???: “Then? I don't know what this loli is, and what's with you keep calling me Granny? For a first meeting, you're a guy who's even ruder than Ros-bo³⁵ here.”

Subaru: “Oooo, that was rude of me, *mademoiselle*³⁶. My name is Natsuki Subaru! Currently a heart-throb Witchbeast hunter. Well, even though it usually isn't me dealing the last hits.”

High-spiritedly announcing his name with a thumbs-up, the self-introduction tapered off a bit toward the end. And then, extending a hand toward the girl with the distrustful face, “And you are?” he prompted,

Subaru: “Now that I've told you my name, I hope you can introduce yourself as well. A simple *jinbutsuhyouka*³⁷, interests and special abilities. Mentioning some of your *shutaruna miryoku*³⁸ as well would be great.”

Ryuzu: “...Ryuzu Meyer. In a way, I am a representative of this Sanctuary.”

³³ English flip. Means “cooperation” (協力), originally “コラボレーション” (collaboration).

³⁴ A contradiction in exhibited characteristics that people find cutely attractive.

³⁵ “-bo” means “little” (坊). Ryuzu's just a cute grandma.

³⁶ Written in Katakana, but I'll leave it because why not.

³⁷ English flip. Means “character evaluation” (人物評価), originally “プロフィール” (profile).

³⁸ English flip. Means “main charms” (主要な魅力), originally “チャームポイント” (charm points).

Listening to Subaru's jests, the loli-granny – the one who called herself Ryuzu, extended a finger through her sloppy sleeves and scratched herself on her forehead,

Ryuzu: "I didn't notice it when you were sleeping, but more than just rude, you're a poor lil' rascal. I get the feeling like I shouldn't have bothered lending you the bed."

Subaru: "The bed, the one I was sleeping on just now?"

Emilia: "Yes, that was Ryuzu-san's house. It was close to the Tomb, so Garfiel carried you there... Really, thank you so much for earlier."

Then, seeing Emilia lowering her head, Ryuzu shook her head slowly. Judging from that exchange, the two of them seemed to have already met while Subaru was unconscious. Either way, it was true that she had helped him out.

Subaru: "I didn't know it was like that, sorry for the rude things I said. The bed, lending it to me helped me a great deal. I've been late to say this, really really sorry!"

Ryuzu: "...Wha was that, scared me. Gar-bo never apologizes straightforwardly like that. Natsuki... Subaru, was it? It'll be Su-bo then."

Subaru: "That sounds a bit like the beginning of a weather forecast³⁹, but that's ok. In turn, let me call you Ryuzu-san then."

After he had expressed his thanks, Ryuzu's annoyed expression was cancelled. As they peacefully decided on what to call each other, Subaru continued with "Ok...",

Subaru: "So Ryuzu-san, just now you said there'd be a problem, what was it? Garfiel taking the Trial would be problematic?"

Ryuzu: "You sure changed your tone quickly. Aah, that. It'd be a problem, quite a big one. Basically, if those who originate from the Sanctuary challenge the Trial, it would violate the Contract."

³⁹ I have no idea why he gives this reaction, but I'm guessing it has to do with the background music played during a weather forecast spots.

Subaru: "Contracts again..."

With all the Contracts and Covenants popping up, restricting this and that, Subaru shot a sickened look at Roswaal. And, receiving that look, Roswaal shrugged,

Roswaal: "Uuunfortunately, this Contract has nothing to do with the Mathers family... Well, I shouldn't say noothing to do with, but we were nooot the main culprit. Iii mean, my family had something of a suppoorting role in it."

Subaru: "Your defense statement is all good, now cough it up. The detailed contents of the Contract, in three sentences."

Roswaal: "So striiict. Weeell to put it simply, the condition for the liberation of the inhabitants of the Sanctuary is to pass the Trial, but the Trial may only be challenged by someone from the oooutside who possess the Quuualifications. Thaaat is to say, the situation right now is..."

Emilia: "I am the only one who can do it, is that right?"

Understanding at the end of Roswaal's explanation, Emilia finished off his words. Roswaal nodded in confirmation and turned to look toward Ryuzu.

Roswaal: "Iiin fact, this is the understanding of the inhaaabitants of the Sanctuary. They expect that Emilia-sama would challenge the Trial, and hope that Emilia-sama could overcoome it."

Emilia: "I don't want you to think I am hesitating when I ask this... but, hypothetically, if someone other than me challenges the Trial, what would happen?"

Emilia's violet pupils turned to Garfiel and asked this hypothetical question. And, it was Ryuzu who replied, saying "As for that",

Ryuzu: "Up to now, at least for as long as I have been alive, no one has ever challenged the Trial. So, there is no way to say. Residents or outsiders alike, no one has yet challenged it."

Subaru: "No one, up to now? I'm afraid to ask but, Ryuzu-san... How old are you?"

Judging from the common setting of loli-grannies, the answer to Subaru's question just now could be something really scary. But actually, Ryuzu said "Not like that", and then, as if looking toward something far away,

Ryuzu: "I don't know of the time when this place was first created. But at most, I think, it would be a hundred and ten-odd years."

Subaru: "Too much! At least, that's the oldest out of everyone I've met so far."

Well, if you put Spirits and the spiritual-bodied Witch aside. Taking in that side note, Subaru turned a worried look at Emilia. But even under that gaze, the tinge of darkness in Emilia's expression did not leave her.

Emilia: "In any case, I understand now. Either way, if I don't pass the Trial, I won't be able to leave the Sanctuary. So I will accept."

Subaru: "Emilia-tan's heroic look when making a resolve is super-captivating, but maybe it's better if we look into some more cautious strategies? Find some shortcuts or loopholes first, and it won't be too late to do the challenge then, I think."

Emilia: "You shouldn't pour water on someone just when they've got so pumped up and all, it's reeeaaaally inappropriate, I think."

But, while Subaru was just trying to place her far away from any possibility of danger, Emilia pouted up her lips with a look of disapproval. And receiving her reproachful gaze,

Subaru: "Come to think of it, isn't there something fishy about how we got taken along for a ride like this? I can't get rid of the feeling that something's off, actually. This whole situation just seems too well set-up, like preparations were in place for us to go on this path and going as far as having the police controlling the traffic."

Emilia: "I totally can't understand that. Subaru says some reeeaaaally befuddling things sometimes."

Subaru: "I haven't heard anyone say «befuddle» in a while..."

Seeing Emilia sharpen her gaze at the customary exchange between them, Subaru hurriedly flapped his hands around saying “No no no”,

Subaru: “Nevermind that part, I meant I got a really strong feeling that this whole situation has been prearranged somehow. The half-bloods not being able to leave, and then nominating Emilia-tan to step-up and all. And then to say that it’s all already understood and agreed upon.”

Emilia: “Prearranged, by who?”

Subaru: “Who, it could only be one person.”

At Emilia’s question, right then and there Subaru did a sudden spin. And at the end of the rotation his finger pointed toward...

Subaru: “You, wasn’t it?”

Garfiel: “Huh? Me?”

Subaru: “Ah, wrong one, sorry, turned too far. This one, this one—— You, wasn’t it, Roswaal?”

Roswaal: “It coouldn’t have been any slooopier.”

Smiling bitterly, Roswaal gave his assessment of Subaru’s movements. But immediately he closed a single eye, and projected Subaru within his yellow pupil,

Roswaal: “Hooowever, your observation is good as usual. It’s true, I had hoooped for this situation and broooought it about. Of course, I didn’t have a hand in the staaage itself, though.”

Subaru: “I get the feeling, I understand now.”

Raising up his brows at Roswaal’s words, Subaru seemed to have grasped his intentions. Kept out of the conversation, Emilia showed a confused expression, and tried to listen for what was happening behind it all.

Subaru: “First, I think it’s odd that Roswaal got injured. In the first place, you must have known that you weren’t qualified for the Trial. This should be obvious considering this place is managed by the Mathers family, and that you are acquainted with Garfiel.”

Roswaal: "That is... right. En, correct."

Subaru: "If that's the case, Roswaal would know what would happen to him after he is rejected from the Tomb. Despite this, why did Roswaal go in? Was it rage against the world for no particular reason? Or has he finally reached the limits of holding back his masochist tendencies? Even though both of these are pretty persuasive, I don't think it was either of them."

Roswaal: "Oooy ooooy. Is that the kind of impreeession Subaru-kun haaas of me?"

Seeing Roswaal intentionally ignoring the main point with that reaction, Subaru lifted up a finger with "In other words",

Subaru: "Getting wounded like this was in accordance with Roswaals intentions and had some kind of significance. And that significance would probably... be connected to the Royal Selection, I think."

Roswaal: "..."

Subaru: "But I was hoping to ask... The villagers of Arlam Village, they are gathered in some kind of cathedral right now, right?"

Subaru suddenly changed the topic, and turned to Ram, who was standing beside Roswaal. Keeping her silence, she lightly drew in her chin in a nod, and then,

Ram: "En, yes. The villagers are gathered in the Cathedral... being confined by the residents of the Sanctuary."

Subaru: "Is that so, confined. Earlier, our conversation got cut off because we had to go visit the Tomb, but... Just what kind of confinement is it? And why was it necessary for the Sanctuary guys to place Roswaal along with all the villagers under house arrest?"

The one Subaru turned to next, was Garfiel, who was still leaning against the wall. His eyes narrowed, and grew sharpened at Subaru's question, and followed it with "It's obvious ain't it",

Garfiel: "Telling ya, this here ain't us grabbin onto a way out'a troubled times. But we ain't exactly in a good mood when the Lord-sama and his tag-alongs just comes like it's fine to set our problems aside and use this place as they like y'know?"

Subaru: "By your problems you mean of course..."

Ryuzu: "That it is impossible for us to leave this Sanctuary for the outside world."

Continuing from Subaru's words, Ryuzu finished his sentence. A dark and burdened expression unbefitting of her youthful face descended, as she cast down her eyes, and continued in a thin voice,

Ryuzu: "As I have said before, I have been alive for a hundred and some-decades. But, never once have I gone outside this Sanctuary. Anyhow, adhering to this contract since the time of my birth, I have been bound by this land. And precisely for that reason, it was half giving up... and half refusing to let go of hope."

Garfiel: "Granny'd like to get to see the outside world for a bit. Th'others too. Just to get chance to, it's something worth biting onto, yeah? Having the weakened Lord-sama, and villagers that we could take as hostages falling into our hands, 's gotten pretty convenient."

With Ryuzu and Garfiel's words, the atmosphere in the room suddenly turned.

In short, they have just told Subaru the reason for the confinement—

—That is, confessed the motive of their crime. The aspect that Subaru had not noticed up to now, was that the relationship between him, and them, had been that of a prisoner, and jailor. A relationship between the victim, and the perpetrator.

Subaru: "So, it's like that. You guys, are holding the villagers as hostages... In order to free yourselves from the Sanctuary."

Ryuzu: "You can think of it any way you like. And then, the one who can fulfill that condition is..."

In an instant, Ryuzu's words clouded over, as she looked toward Emilia. Taking in the meaning of that look, Emilia once again realized her position.

Emilia: "Me— That's what you mean isn't it?"

Understanding the flow of the situation, Emilia closed her eyes once more. And when, after several seconds, she opened them again, there were no longer any confused emotions in her eyes. There was only resolve, for she had made her decision.

Emilia: "The villagers, you haven't done anything terrible to them, have you?"

Garfiel: "'Course not. If I treated them roughly, I'd be taking my anger out on them. I'd rather die before I do something like that, sorry."

Just like that, Emilia's ability to place others before herself was beyond estimation. Even after deciding to face the unknown dangers of the Trial, she was already worrying about the villagers and the others.

It was her strength, and her fragileness, when she is like this, that made Subaru so drawn to her.

Roswaal: "That's an unsatisfied look on your face, iiisn't it?"

Subaru: "...That should be obvious. In the end, we still got taken along for the ride. Since we didn't notice it when we got on, now that we have noticed it, we still have no choice but to keep riding."

Grinding his teeth holding in his vexation, Subaru put up a smiling look to bicker with Roswaal. But then, quietly remembering, he turned back again,

Subaru: "I forgot to mention, the reason you got wounded."

Roswaal: "En en, go on. I won't be marking you on it."

Subaru: "It was an act. Or rather, it was an opening gambit."

Seeing Subaru scratching his neck as he said this, Roswaal's expression slightly congealed. This reaction was all taken in by Subaru's single open eye.

Subaru: "Being placed in a state of confinement, the people of Arlam Village probably didn't take it well. Naturally, they must have objected. So, I think you had to show that something was being done. Being the Lord, it would've been great if you could just go nuts and chase Garfiel away or something... But the people of the Sanctuary are your subject as well. So, you couldn't really do that."

Roswaal: "Umu. So, whaaat happened then?"

Subaru: "You could only swallow Garfiel and the residents' condition. That is, liberating the half-bloods of the Sanctuary. But this couldn't be done without Emilia-tan's assistance. Yet, the villagers and the

residents wouldn't just accept that. So, the rest is simple— You challenge the Trial, showing that you've accepted their requests, and that you intend to liberate them from their confinements.”

Roswaal: “———”

Subaru: “I don't know how well you could have predicted how much damage you would take from the Miasma, but if you predicted it wouldn't kill you, then it's not really that much of a gamble. The greater the damage you take, the more serious it looks and the more sympathy you get. And, it sets up the expectations for the final act that will be coming after you.”

So in the end, everything about Roswaal getting wounded had been a performance to further his intentions. As their lord, the magnitude of Roswaal's power was well known to his subjects and the villagers of Arlam. If the Trial can injure a person like him so severely, what will they think of a person who then appears and overcame such a Trial to save them?

Subaru: “That, was what I imagine happened judging from my impression of your malicious prejudiced opportunism, so how's that for an answer sheet?”

Roswaal: “—Eeeeyaaa lii'm surprised. That was actually, really, reeeally astonishing. It's only been a few days, buuut just whaat on earth has happened to yooou...”

Roswaal laughed from the depths of his throat at Subaru's words, showering praises at him. And, clapping his hands, with a smile clear as day pasted over his face,

Roswaal: “Iiimpressive indeed. Almost a perfect aaanswer. I can't imagine how you could have read this far. Aaafter all, I was right to have piiick you up.”

Subaru: “Lovely, thanks. Making me wanna puke.”

Seeing the thankful-looking Roswaal, as his deductions was being confirmed, Subaru looked away unable to hide the revulsion in his chest.

At Roswaal's intentions, at himself who had read into those intentions, at the fact that those intentions were for Emilia's benefit... and, the thought that, somewhere deep down, he himself approved of it, was all too revolting.

Oblivious to Subaru and Roswaal's skullduggery, Emilia was still occupied with Ryuzu and Garfiel and the topic about the Trial. Watching her from behind, Subaru was determined that he would not let her hear these words, no matter what.

It would be enough if she just looked ahead. Pristine, and noble, he would not want her to know of the dark intentions behind her. If Subaru had to cover himself in mud so she could be showered with praise, it would be all be worth it.

In the Royal Selection, she hasn't done anything of note so far, and had no solid footing to stand on. If her Royal Selection begins at this Sanctuary, he will do everything in his power to aid her. With renewed determination, and firm resolve, Subaru decided.

Then, as he was clenching up his fists, behind Subaru, entrusting all his weight onto the bed,

Roswaal: "...Almost, correct. Though that wasn't the only reason I reentered the Tomb."

Quietly whispering, it was in a voice that only the peach-colored haired maid beside the bed could hear, and, listening, only she alone cast down her pained gaze in reaction.

Arc 4 Chapter 14 - Questions and Answers

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 10, Chapter 5 “The First Step Forward”, Part 4

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#)

Roswaal: “You felled the White Whale and repelled the Witch Cult that had been targeting the Estate. Whether it was sealing an Alliance with Candidate Crusch-sama, or the aforementioned battle, your achievements have certainly grown— Fuuuuumu.”

Inadvertently laying more and more of his weight onto the bed, Roswaal touched his chin and closed his eyes. Uttering in his mouth, in this exchange with Subaru in the middle of the night, were all the various things that had occurred in his absence.

And Subaru, pressing down his bad habit of derailing the conversation, tried his best to eliminate the boasting and the tales of suffering, and had given what he thought was an objective explanation of the events. Then, looking back on his conducts once more,

Ram: “...To put it bluntly, you seem to have done so much that it’s starting to make me doubt whether your words are delusional. When did you become a character in an action-adventure stage play, Barusu?”

Subaru: “What you just said gave me a pretty subtle feeling I couldn’t really explain, you know... Though, I’m also still wondering how I did all that myself. But whether it’s by my own evaluations or other people’s evaluations, it was no small contribution, was it?”

It was a result that even Kong-Ming⁴⁰ wouldn't have dared to put together. And even under Ram's cold sarcasm, it seemed that she at least acknowledged the significance of Subaru's accomplishments. So, bit by bit, his spirits rose.

Roswaal: "A result beyond all expectations, there is no oother way to put it. Suuuch an achievement, even I... or, not even anyone, could have imaaagined it."

As if he had finally finished digesting his astonishment, Roswaal spoke these words of full of praise. Then, with a serious expression so rare to him, his mismatched eyes gazed into Subaru, who was sitting in a chair in front of his bed.

Roswaal: "Fiiirst, I want to once more convey my words of graaatitude— For protecting my land, and the people of my realm, you have my deepest gratitude."

Subaru: "Ah, ah oh. Yeah. How should I say this, uh... Hearing you say it like that kinda makes me wanna to curl up in a ball. It wasn't that big of a deal or anythi..."

Ram: "It seems Barusu is a little, unable to grasp the gravity of your words of gratitude, Roswaal-sama."

As Subaru put a stop to Roswaal's courteous words of thanks, Ram took a step forward and interrupted. Her clear, unwavering eyes were looking down on him,

Ram: "Interrupting on your superior, and on top of that rejecting his words of thanks is in its essence unforgivable. Besides, as a Margrave, Roswaal-sama is someone who bears full authority over a section of the Kingdom of Lugunica— Words of gratitude from him holds far more weight than Barusu can imagine."

Subaru: "———"

Ram: "From Roswaal-sama's position, he shouldn't even have to bother looking at someone beneath him, let alone offer words of gratitude. To have gone to such lengths, please have some consideration for its significance."

⁴⁰ Reference to a fictional character in Water Margin, one of the Four Great Classical novels of Chinese Literature. Funnily enough, its in-universe nickname is Hairy Star or Hairy Mane (昴宿), which, in Chinese Astronomy, is also the name of the mansion that corresponds to the Pleiades, which, in Japanese, is pronounced Subaru (for more details, see [here](#) and [here](#)).

Like a slap in the face, Ram threw out these words that wiped off Subaru's over-optimistic thoughts. Listening to this, unable to come up with a single reply, Subaru hung his head. Then, saying "Nooo nooo~", Roswaal lightly waved his hands as if to smooth things over,

Roswaal: "The way Ram said it was a biiit too exaggerated. My words don't carry thaaat much value."

Ram: "Roswaal-sama—"

Hearing Ram's concerned call, Roswaal nodded, and with "Hooowever", he continued,

Roswaal: "Setting aside the weight of my gratitude due to my social standing for now, the weight of what Subaru-kun has accomplished is clear to anyone's eyes. Assss such, if I don't reward you appropriately, you can eaaasily imagine the disappointment and public outrage that would be directed tooowards me."

Subaru: "...So then, what are you going to do for me?"

Roswaal: "A fitting reward— Subaru-kun, do you remember what happened in the hall, related to the Royal Selection?"

Seeing Subaru's throat choking up, Roswaal narrowed his eyes.

As this gaze was piercing through him, what passed across Subaru's mind were the abominable memories that even now made his chest burn with shame and self-derision whenever he recalls them. The declaration he had made in that place, his reckless words, his lack of understanding, his lack of self-understanding... The laughable nonsense uttered by that foolish self, who had gotten even the most important thing wrong in his mind. But still, even so—

Subaru: "I remember. It's not something I could ever forget... or should forget, I think."

Roswaal: "Then, as my reward for your actions, how about I make the words you said in that place into a reality— Rest assured, on the dawn when we leave this place, I shall appoint you as a Knight."

Lifting his head, for a moment, Subaru was unable to take in the meaning of those words. Seeing Subaru wavering, blinking, Roswaal nodded his head,

Roswaal: "Fighting alongside the Duchess in the battle against White Whale, and slaying a Sin Archbishop of the Witch Cult, I cannot allow these deeds to go down in anonymity. Your name, the name of Knight

Natsuki Subaru shall be held with honor and spoken with admiration throughout the Kingdom— When that is so, no one will be able to laugh at the words you have spoken in that hall.”

Hoping to be of assistance to Emilia, they had been the barkings of an empty-handed youth.

The youth who had been dreaming, and who had so many times been broken by the face of reality, having despaired, been sunk into madness, driven by vengeance into despising all things, and at last saved by love — Now, he was here.

Everything that happened in that time, surely, the honor that had passed through Roswaal’s lips... would be proof, that there had been some value in all of that.

—That, no longer remaining in the minds of anyone except Subaru, was the fact that they were Rem’s deeds.

Subaru: “...Thank you, I will accept. If it means it would bring some meaning to that battle we fought.”

Roswaal: “It is an achievement to be proud of, and I will not allow anyone to make light of it. You now have the right to stand by Emilia-sama’s side with your head held high. By your own strength, you have earned this.”

Subaru: “...It wasn’t, just my own strength.”

Listening to Roswaal’s words, he murmured this under his breath. Watching Roswaal lightly furrowing his brows as if not understanding its meaning, Subaru closed his eyes and took a deep breath. Then, as he opened them again, he casually shrugged and,

Subaru: “That was a serious exchange, oy. Gotta be careful, after being out-of-character for so long it’ll be embarrassing to go back to normal again. My face is already heating up!”

Roswaal: “...Yooou’re quite right. Eeyaaaeya, that was not like me at all, even my shoulder’s gotten stiiiff. With the relationship between you and me, it really isn’t like us to be talking so seeeriously.”

As if mirroring Subaru as he broke off his serious face, Roswaal’s expression relaxed as well, and the tense atmosphere of a moment ago had all but disappeared. And, watching over the conversation

between Subaru and her master, Ram let out a small sigh, and with “Well”, she continued the conversation,

Ram: “Then, Barusu, you have something you want to ask Roswaal-sama, don’t you? That’s why you placed Emilia-sama far away from our conversation, after all.”

Subaru: “Your shrewdness earlier really helped getting this conversation going, much appreciated... It’s not that I’m treating Emilia-tan as a nuisance, but it seems Ros-chi’s mouth will get stiff if she’s here.”

Ram’s pointed observation made Subaru take on an awkward smile. Seeing this smile, Ram directed her gaze toward the place where Emilia had been standing, making sure once more that there was only an unpopulated empty space left over by her absence.

Ram: “I got Ryuzu-sama to accompany her on a tour of the Sanctuary... But when Emilia-sama heard that Barusu will be remaining here, she seemed to have been feeling a little lonely.”

Subaru: “Even though I’m glad I’m being relied on, if I think about all the things to come, I can’t be rushing to every immediate desire in front of me. Most likely, she’ll meet up with Otto on the way. Though I am a bit worried about having him alone with her... That bastard Otto will probably make a move on her... Aaaah what do I do? Emilia-tan is super mega adorable, oh no I’m getting worried.”

Roswaal: “Talking to yourself and making yourself even more worried is baaad idea, don’t you think? Anyway, you were nooot mistaken— The truth is, if there are things that I don’t want Emilia-sama to hear, I would probably neeeever open my mouth.”

Seeing Subaru’s heart fluttering about insubstantial worries, Roswaal shook his head, and laid bare his shameless secretiveness. And as Roswaal did so, Subaru closed one of his eyes, and with a “Just as I thought” put his inner thoughts to his tongue,

Subaru: “You’re intentionally restricting information to Emilia-tan... Just who do you think you’re trying to imitate here?”

Roswaal: “It’s necessary to be selective with the information, dooon’t you think? As a Royal Selection Candidate, Emilia-sama’s importance is faaar above mine. But, right now, her body and her knowledge have not caught up to accompany her qualification and status, and are still in need of polishing. So, while she is still learning, putting too many burdens on her would be unreeeasonable...”

Subaru: "Saying this like you're a guy who only meant to provide a carefree learning environment for Emilia-tan, that's a pretty way to frame it. But to leave her in the dark in a fatal situation, having full knowledge, but failing to tell her, that doesn't sound reasonable at all, now does it. Even for you, that can't be a good thing."

Knowing that Roswaal was trying to gloss it over with superficial words, Subaru held back his urge to argue, and continued his pursuit in a quiet voice. Seeing Subaru's calm disguise, Roswaal closed a single eye, and silently gazed back at him in return.

Intently, his single eye – The left, yellow pupil continued to stare into Subaru. Unaware of the meaning of that unsettling gaze, Subaru's body wavered.

And then, as if having read into his discomfort, Roswaal laughed,

Roswaal: "Weeell, I imagined you would be pursuuuing this to the end sooner or later? That's why, this time I have prepared my resooolve."

Subaru: "Resolve?"

Roswaal: "The resolve that I will no longer dodge Subaru-kun's questions and will now give aaanswers. Even if I want to run, I am burdened by this wound, now is just the perfect time, dooon't you think?"

With a dry, rattling laugh, on the bed, Roswall lightly tapped himself on the thigh as he pronounced this. For just a moment, Subaru was taken aback by how meekly he had accepted defeat.

Subaru: "...Just what, kind of wind is blowing here..."

Roswaal: "Thaaat you don't trust me up to now makes me feel a bit looonely. But then again, considering the relationship between you and I, I can't blame you for feeeeling this way."

Subaru: "Not that I think it's good to be so blatant with my wariness, but with everything that's happened up to now, it's only to be expected. You've always been a little on the excessively secretive side, after all... But this time, I can trust you?"

Roswaal: "Of course."

Seeing Subaru's suspicious gaze, Roswaal nodded and lightly opened his arms.

Roswaal: “Everything that you have accomplished over these past few days have given me more than enough proof to open my heart to you. I can be at ease now. From now on, I can place my trust in you, and into the depths of my heart accept you and recognize you— as my accooompliice.”

Subaru: “Hold on. Why, do I get the feeling I’ve just been given a few heavy crosses to bear? It’s alright if you don’t rip everything open like that, just letting me touch it a little is enough.”

Roswaal: “Ayaaya, even when it’s bursting out of me you’re stiiill so cold.”

Subaru: “It’s not that, but if you suddenly pull it all out like that, it’s just a bit too heavy...”

As their exchange was starting to sound like a couple who had just began dating disagreeing about where to take their relationship, Subaru coughed and tried to sort out his thoughts, and began with “Anyhow”,

Subaru: “Let’s leave the accomplice part for another conversation, for now, just let me ask some questions I’ve been wanting to ask you— So, what’s the real reason you’re hiding all this information from Emilia. First, let’s start from there.”

Roswaal: “———”

Once again, Roswaal closed one of his eyes and glared at Subaru.

How Roswaal chooses which information is shared with Emilia — The implications that can follow from this, including all the events of the previous loops, would be unfathomable.

The fact that she was a half-elf by birth — if she had known that this information would incite the Witch Cult into action, then perhaps they might have been able to prepare effective countermeasures against the attack on Arlam Village and the Roswaal estate.

And on the other side, it would have had an impact on Subaru’s actions as he frantically dashed to-and-fro to salvage the situation, then, as a result, maybe what happened to Rem would have—

Subaru: “Answer me, Roswaal. If you want to make Emilia-tan the Monarch, then surely, it would be just as inconvenient for you if she dropped out on the way. Yet even so, why are you going to such lengths to put Emilia-tan at a disadvantage by concealing information from her? It doesn’t make any sense.”

Roswaal: “To that question, I will answer it as such— Everything is as you pointed out, and it is because it is exactly as you pointed out, that the information I share with Emilia-sama is restricted.”

Subaru: “...!? What’s that supposed to mean. Are you trying to say that concealing information and placing Emilia at a disadvantage, is somehow necessary for her winning the Royal Selection?”

Roswaal: “Indeed it is so. You don’t think there is any meeerit in that?”

Roswaal’s reply throwing his thoughts into disarray, Subaru furrowed his brows and laid bare his confusion. Seeing this response from Subaru, Roswaal shifted himself on the bed, causing it to creak.

Roswaal: “Subaru-kun, could thiiiis be what you waaanted to say? That when they learn of Emilia-sama’s participation in the Royal Selection, there would be a possibility that the Witch Cult would make a move. And in reality, the Witch Cult did move, and attacked my lands. Furthermore, if I had known of this possibility, then I should have been able to prepare some appropriate countermeasures.”

Subaru: “Y-yeah. Exactly like that. Anyone would think that, it should be obvious. I might not have known, but the relationship between the Witch Cult and half-elves is common knowledge, isn’t it? In fact, you must have known. If that’s the case, then why didn’t you prepare anything... No, even before that, why did you leave your estate and seclude yourself at the Sanctuary?”

Roswaal: “I’ve been confined here in the Sanctuary, it wasn’t as if I meant to be away from my estate for so many days...”

Subaru: “Your excuses won’t work anymore. How you got injured and placed into a state of house arrest was when you challenged the Tomb in order to appease the villagers from Arlam. In other words, it was a consequence of me evacuating the villagers from the Witch Cult... So before that, not returning was by your own intention.”

Roswaal: “Using logic to argue against an opponent you’re angry at does pay off. It reeeally is, a good habit to get into.”

Hearing Subaru’s rejection of his simple excuse, Roswaal casually shrugged as if he had never expected it to fool him. Displeased with this expression, Subaru took a step forward, but,

Subaru: “...Ram.”

Ram: “Roswaal-sama is burdened with wounds. But even so, to incinerate Subaru, a single fingertip would be sufficient... But Ram, will not forgive such insolent behaviour in front of her.”

Subaru: “You seemed to have accepted it. Being treated like a sacrificial piece, it was the same for you as well. He knew those idiots were coming to the village, and yet he fled all alone from that powder keg waiting to blow. How do you forgive something like that?”

Ram: “It’s not a matter of forgiving or not forgiving. Ram will pardon any and all action taken by Roswaal-sama. No matter how he treats Ram, whether it’s cutting me down or casting me aside, it is all the same.”

Subaru: “You—!!”

In front of Ram’s incomprehensible devotion, Subaru’s throat filled up with rage. But even so, he could not suddenly resort to violence. Perhaps it was because of the sober judgement that he would not be a match against either of the two in front of him, or perhaps, it was because—

Subaru: “...Even Rem, was sacrificed because of those kind of reasons I can’t understand.”

Ram: “—? I don’t know who you are referring to, but Ram has no relation to anyone by this name. To Ram, Roswaal-sama is everything, and everything else is insignificant.”

Even Subaru’s wrenched-out appeal could not bring about the slightest fragment of an echo in Ram’s heart. He had already known that. That for the girl who had forgotten Rem’s existence, that plea would have been meaningless. Yet, at the same time, he also understood.

From the start, he had been aware of Ram’s unusual loyalty to Roswaal.

But this perverse obstinance now, was a different kind of madness than the one carried by the Ram that Subaru had known up to now. And there was no greater reason for this, than her having forgotten Rem’s existence.

Subaru didn’t know the details of what had happened in their past. But piecing together the fragments from what Rem had told him, he could get a sense of the mutual reliance the sisters had for each other.

With her sense of guilt, and her inferiority complex — Swaying in between the two, Rem's complexes had made her become even more deeply dependent on her older sister. And while Ram's instability was not plain to see, when she is around her younger sister, fragments of it would show through.

Just like Rem, whose world mostly consisted of Ram, Ram's world consisted only of Rem and Roswaal. Her complexes having been brought to a resolution, when that narrow world, beginning with Subaru, took in many, various things, Rem changed. But Ram's world had remained narrow.

Having forgotten the person who had made up half of her world, now, Ram's world is comprised only of Roswaal. It may be extreme, but that was the cause of her excessive loyalty to Roswaal.

Roswaal: "Ram, dooon't excite Subaru too much. Aaafter all, Subaru didn't intend to do anything outrageous agaaaainst me. It was ooonly, a step forward."

Ram: "If you say so, Roswaal-sama."

Roswaal: "Yes yes. It's nooo matter. Isn't that right, Subaru-kun. You look a little angry, but you are not taken over by raaage. Something like losing yourself and puuunching me, you would not choose to lose this opportunity to continue our conversation without interruptions, wooould you."

Subaru: "Just what, is that supposed to mean..."

Roswaal: "It's siiimple. If this was the old you, somewhere along this conversation you would have thrown a fit, shouted, and the conversation would have ended. But you didn't, and even while you pressed down your anger you hung on to the argument, without letting go... You have grown up, I meeean to say."

As Roswaal was lightly clapping, delivering this superficial compliment, Subaru felt a burning rage in his chest that made him want to cry out. But, knowing if he gave in to that, it would be giving his opponent exactly what he wanted, he stopped himself, and taking a long, deep breath, he held back the waves of his rage.

—And in doing so, he realized that he had proved Roswaal's previous words correct, and he couldn't hold back his irritation with himself.

Roswaal: "Weeeell now, teasing the young man any more than this would not be adult-like. Since you've shown me how you have grooown up, I should show a bit more matuuurity on my end as well."

Subaru: "...Then please do so. Anyways, please clearly answer my previous question. Answer without trying to dodge it. Why, have you hidden the Witch Cult from Emilia? And why, when you knew that the Witch Cult was coming, did you, the greatest combat force we have, leave the estate!?"

Roswaal: "I can answer both questions with a single answer— I behaved as such in order to avoid a confrontation with the Witch Cult."

Subaru: "Huh—?"

Hearing this calm and orderly reply, for a moment, Subaru couldn't understand.

Chewing them down, swallowing, digesting those words within his mind, and soaking in their contents,

Subaru: "I don't, understand. In order to avoid fighting the Witch Cult... but why? Don't tell me you're allergic to them, or any crap like that!? If you... if you were there, couldn't you have taken those bastards out in one shot? Then the victims..."

Roswaal: "I see. It's true, if I was there, then the casualties from this disturbance would have lessened. I try to have an accurate understanding of my own strength, and I am aware that I am among one of the ten most powerful people in this country. It's safe to say, that if I was there, then the Witch Cult attack this time would have been easily repelled."

Subaru: "If you understand that, then why—!"

Roswaal: "That is, why."

Watching drops saliva flying from Subaru, Roswaal held out a finger to stop him, and then, pointing that same finger toward the ceiling,

Roswaal: "If I had done everything, it would not have Emilia-sama's achievement, nor would it have been your achievement, now would it? Even if my own reputation was improved, it would have been of no use."

Subaru: "———Ah."

What he was saying, Subaru could not understand it at all.

It must have been a joke. Praying, that Roswaal would follow that with some kind of jest, Subaru held his tongue and waited for Roswaal's next words. However, looking at Subaru, who had grown silent, Roswaal only tilted his head,

Roswaal: "How could I deny it? After all, it was a disaster that I can be completely certain was going to happen. How could I possibly not use that to the fullest?"

Subaru: "Y-you...do you even know, what you're saying...?"

Roswaal: "—? I don't understand which part Subaru-kun finds to be a problem. What could it be, I wonder? Was it the damage done to Arlam Village, was it having had to borrow the strength of the mercenaries and Crusch-sama's private army to repulse the Witch Cult...? Or was it about the fact that all these damages could have been avoided?"

Subaru's voice was trembling, and, as if reading into the inner depths of his heart, Roswaal threw out those words as though it was all a matter of course.

Hearing this reply, Subaru felt a tremor trembling through every organ of his body.

Before, when he had spoken with Puck, when the spirit said in front of the sleeping Rem that "This child sacrificed herself to help Lia", Subaru had flown into a rage.

And because that happened, Subaru painfully realized that in between his and the Great Spirit's sensibilities, there was an insurmountable gap that could not be filled in with words. In other words, the rage he felt at that moment made him understand that they had always been two fundamentally different entities.

However, that was not the case for Roswaal. He understood the reason why Subaru was mad, and he knew what Subaru wanted to say— And it was while knowing all of that, that he made this cruel decision.

Subaru: "Hindsight is twenty-twenty, isn't it? In a way, I understand what you're trying to say. In repulsing the Witch Cult's attack, whoever was in command would receive the credit, and that would have no small an impact on the Royal Selection, I can understand that... And I also understand that if you took care of it yourself it would not have the same effect. But!"

Revealing his teeth, Subaru, with a wild swing of his arm,

Subaru: “How many people do you think died because you weren’t there and didn’t bother to say anything!? Sure, the casualties weren’t catastrophic. But still, the number wasn’t zero. People died. Whether it was our own people, or those bastards from the Witch Cult...”

Roswaal: “Even if I was there, the treatment of the Witch Cultists would not have changed. All of them, would just have been reduced to ash. I’ll accept responsibility for the casualties on our side, but to blame me for the enemy’s losses would be a bit of a stretch, don’t you think.”

Subaru: “—B-but, still, couldn’t there have been a more peaceful... No, it’s not about that! Every single thing you’ve been saying had been in hindsight! It’s true it went well. Our losses were minimal, the enemies were wiped out. Emilia-tan is safe, the villagers of Arlam were all safely evacuated... But that was, all just coincidence. Originally th—”

Originally, if Subaru didn’t do anything, the villagers, everyone in the mansion, Emilia...

Subaru: “They should have been dead. This time, if everything didn’t work out perfectly... Everyone would have been wretchedly, cruelly, agonizingly... tortured to death.”

Covering his face, Subaru strangled back the tears within his voice.

On the other side of his closed eyelids, once again those scenes of hell that he could never forget emerged. The village consumed by flames. The cadavers strewn about the ground. The corpses of the children. And Rem’s dead body abandoned on the mansion’s garden. And, at last, the frozen, ending of the world.

—All of that, would have been the indisputable World if Subaru could not overturn it by using Return by Death.

Subaru: “If you were there, none of those things would have happened... You knew, but still watched them die. How many times, have you killed those people...?”

Roswaal: “It’s troubling to be so misunderstood. The ones who attacked were the Witch Cult, noot me. Besides, the Witch Cult’s attack was stopped by your hands before anything could happen, the victims you spoke of never existed— You are only repeating nonsense.”

Subaru: “—Is that so.”



Illustration from Volume 10, coloring by Norvak ([source](#))

Listening to Roswaal's cold words, Subaru dropped his shoulders and replied in a quiet voice.

Nonsense — If that's what he considered them to be, then there was nothing Subaru can say to change that. Return by Death could not be explained to him, nor could Roswaal be blamed for things that never happened in this reality.

The only one who had experienced that hell was Subaru, and the one who exonerated Roswaal of the crime of bringing about that hell, was also Subaru.

Subaru: "...If I turned out to be still just a useless piece of trash, then what would you have done? To make Emilia the Monarch, you want that as much as I do. But the odds were just too one-sided, it's not even enough to gamble on... It was far more likely that everything would have ended there."

Roswaal: "However, you overturned such a possibility— Are you unsatisfied?"

Subaru: "I am unsatisfied. You don't seem to be the kind of guy who would leave things to something so uncertain."

There are several kinds of people who gamble. There are those who don't know whether they will win or lose, and rely entirely on their luck. And there are those who do not wish to be directed by fate, and only when they have assembled the best possible hand, do they at the very last moment leave it to chance.

And then, there are those who pre-arrange everything from beginning to end, and would only run the fixed gambling match where victory was already certain.

Subaru: "You are not the kind who would gamble in the first place. So, why did you do it?"

Roswaal: "—Because, I believe in you."

When Subaru asked a second time, Roswaal's voice dropped in pitch as he replied.

Hearing this answer, Subaru couldn't stop a snicker from leaking from his lips.

Subaru: "So you don't feel like giving me a serious answer after all."

Roswaal: “Whether you believe my story or not is aaaaaanother matter, but everything I’ve said is true? Because here, tonight, I’ve decided that I will not lie to you. The things that I cannot say, I will not say, and if there are things inappropriate for this occasion, I will not mention them. But what I do say, I swear that they are free of falsehoods.”

In response to Subaru’s words that were tinged with a color of disappointment, Roswaal said this in a solemn voice. But, was this something that could be believed? Having already lost all positive impressions of Roswaal in the conversation up to now, Subaru was no longer able to accept everything at face value.

In front of Subaru’s sharpening glare, Roswaal rolled his head,

Roswaal: “I will say it again— The reason I made this decision, is because I believed in you. I believed, that if you realized the danger Emilia-sama was in, you will strive to establish an alliance with Crusch-sama, and do everything in your power to repel the Witch Cult, and distinguish yourself in doing so.”

Subaru: “Even if we pretend for a moment that’s true, just how the hell did you decide to believe in someone like me! What do you know about me! We’ve only known each other for a month, what me looked like I was the kind of man that you can place that kind of faith in?”

Stomping on the floor, Subaru objected to Roswaal’s shameless and flowery words. Pointing out a finger, Subaru shook his head, rejecting what he had just said,

Subaru: “But it couldn’t be. When I last left you, I was absolutely, one-hundred-percent trash. It was only because of what happened afterwards, that the trash got somewhat better. But what happened afterwards, no one else knows except me— So just what part of me did you believe in!?”

Roswaal closed a single eye, and disturbingly, with the one yellow pupil, stared into Subaru. As if to shake off that stare, Subaru kicked the floor with all his might.

Subaru: “It’s absurd! Are you really trying to say that you trusted that empty-headed idiot to get everything to work out, and just left your people and everything else behind like it’s some kind of a game, risking your own position and future as the wager? What am I even supposed to say to something that callous!?”

Roswaal: “...It seems, this is the end of today’s conversaaaation.”

Whereas Subaru had laid his anger bare, Roswaal only whispered in a lonely voice. Upon hearing that whisper, Subaru screamed, lending voice to his inexhaustible vexation.

Subaru: “If you don’t intend to speak straight-forwardly, it’ll be pointless no matter you say. After this conversation, I don’t intend to believe anything you say anymore.”

Roswaal: “It seems your impression of me has taken a dive, that is truuuly regrettable... Even though I don’t think there is a need to confirm it, but regarding our conversation tonight, Emilia-sama...”

Subaru: “I won’t tell her. There isn’t much information to begin with, plus it’s all been embellished, there wouldn’t be any point in telling her. You’ve anticipated this as well, haven’t you? That’s why you’ve been going round-and-round.”

Regardless of Roswaal’s true intentions, the Royal Selection was still ongoing, and creating any more friction between Emilia and Roswaal was not something he wanted to do. Besides, with Emilia now acting as a representative of the villagers of Arlam, Roswaal’s faction needs to remain united.

It gave him spasms to think how he was going along with Roswaal’s intentions, but challenging the Trial would improve how people saw Emilia — And all of that, was controlled within the palms of that man’s hands.

Roswaal: “You understand everything, and the anger you harbor towards me is unbearable... yet you didn’t flip over the table or anything like that. You reeeally are, just as I expected.”

As Roswaal said this to Subaru, who had been grinding his teeth to hold back his vexation, Subaru lifted his head, and saw Roswaal’s face twisting into a truly revolting expression.

Roswaal: “You are, without a doubt, worthy of being my accomplice— No?”

Subaru: “...You bastard, I hope you die a worthy death.”

Roswaal: “I know. Without a doubt, I will be falling into hell. That is why, before that happens, I must extend my utmost brutality over the present world, to the best of my ability.”

Sending a sharp glare at Roswaal’s declaration, without a word, Subaru turned around and stormed out of the room.

Any further conversation would have been pointless. If Roswaal had no plans of revealing his true intentions, if there was nothing Subaru could do to break into his thoughts, then nothing could have come of that exchange. But,

Subaru: “—You think everything will happen as you expect them to, and everyone will dance to your tune.”

Clenching his fist tightly, walking down the street in the night, Subaru prepared his new resolve.

Tomorrow, Roswaal would have Emilia challenge the Trial, to overturn the understanding of the people of the Sanctuary and Arlam Village, and their contempt for half-elves.

What may arise in that process, how many burdens Emilia will have to endure, were not within that man’s considerations. In the end, no matter how many wounds Emilia will bear, even if her heart was worn to its core, he would only frivolously laugh at the events unfolding in accordance to his will. If that were the case,

Subaru: “I won’t let it happen. That girl... Emilia, I will protect her.”

The Qualification to challenge the Trial — If the dream he saw in the Tomb was not only a dream, then Subaru would also have been granted that Qualification.

It may have been granted on the whim of a Witch, but with it, he could thwart Roswaal’s plans. All of the pain and tears that have come into existence only because that man cared nothing about those around him, Subaru will put a stop to them here.

Subaru: “—That, is what I must accomplish in this Sanctuary.”

Upwards, across from where he threw up his fist, was the floating, pale-blue moon.

As if to hold onto that far and unreachable light, he closed tight his fist, and, sketching out the form of that cute silver-haired girl within his thoughts, he determined, he will crash head-on into that clown’s devious plans.

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Ram: “—Was that, really alright?”

In the room that Subaru had stormed out of, Ram, who had been watching over their conversation, asked this quietly. Hearing this, her master shook his head as if devoid of strength.

Roswaal: “Such a reaction was ooonly to be expected. But even if it was expected, it is a depressing thing, to be gouging at a young man’s heart.”

Ram: “You do know there is no need to lie in front of Ram?”

Roswaal: “I’m glad you’re wooorried about me, but those were my honest thoughts. Why, in Ram’s heart do I really seem like someone who enjoys doing these things?”

Answering by wordlessly averting her eyes from her master, Ram rearranged the bed sheets that had been ruffled in the earlier argument. As she did this, her fingers felt a hardness across her master’s stomach, and she pulled it out of the sheets.

Ram: “Roswaal-sama. This is...”

Roswaal: “Aah, sooorry. If Subaru-kun had seen this, thiiings would have gotten quite cooomplicated. But it would have been too much punishment if I had put this under my butt. If I’m not careful...”

Receiving what she passed back as if it was very precious, Roswaal gently caressed its surface as he took it. Then, he said “Anyhow”, touching a finger to his chin,

Roswaal: “Emilia-sama’s qualification is now confirmed, and Subaru-kun has been fired up. Tomorrow night, the Trial will begin... Ram, what do you think will haaappen?”

Ram: “Roswaal-sama’s considerations are beyond Ram’s ability to guess... Roswaal-sama, you know what is going to happen, then?”

Roswaal: “This thing isn’t that conveeenient. Compared to the incomplete ones held by the Witch Cult, it is somewhat superior, but it is nothing more than a poor counterfeit, so far from what she desired. The argument with Subaru-kun just now, how much of that do you think happened as described?”

Roswaal took a deep breath as if contemplating, and seeing this, Ram slightly raised her brows and then timidly, with hesitation,

Ram: “Then, how much of what you said to Barusu was...”

Roswaal: “Even though there was some acting... Most of it was according to my true feelings. No no, but of course I knew Subaru-kun would be angry. But while I knew it, I could also add some things that I wanted to say as well, isn’t that so?”

Roswaal waved his hands to Ram as if to explain himself, and then, with “Anyhow”, he continued,

Roswaal: “To be despised by the partner of my heart, it does feel painful to be thought of this way, as if I had only been thinking of myself. Oh, how childish I still am, my spiteful friend.”

Roswaal laughed as he spoke.

Wrapped within his arms, precious, precious, was a book with black binding.

Roswaal placed his fingertips over the binding of the book, and slowly, and slowly, he continued to trace over it.

Lovingly, and lovingly, slowly, and slowly—

Arc 4 Chapter 15 - Qualifications and Trial

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 10, Chapter 3 “A Long-Awaited Reunion”, Parts 5-6

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Parts 2+3](#)

—On the morning of the next day, trodding on grass still adorned by the morning’s dew, Subaru was looking up toward the entrance of the ruins he had visited the day before.

Yesterday, having been restricted by time, he didn’t get a chance to take a good look at the exteriors. But looking at it now, it all actually seemed to have been surprisingly well maintained.

Although the callously sprawling ivy had spread to cover the entire exterior of the entrance, the plants surrounding the Tomb have been neatly attended to, and he could discern on the Tomb itself signs of restorations of broken walls that had deteriorated over the ages.

Subaru: “Not really sure what kind of relationship those guys here have with the Tomb.”

Touching his hand to the walls that were showing strange colors under the light of the Sun, Subaru mumbled this under his breath.

He thought back to the conversation with Garfiel and Ryuzu in the previous night inside the room in which Roswaal was confined. They all wanted Emilia to take the Trial, and hoped, as a result, she would be able to liberate them from their imprisonment within the Sanctuary.

Subaru: “Judging from what they said, for Garfiel and the others, the Witch is just something of a nuisance, isn’t it? So why are they maintaining the Tomb like it’s so important to them...”

Otto: “Maybe it’s the opposite. The Tomb is the reason that the people here are all bound to this land, right? So until someone passes the Trial, they mustn’t allow the Tomb to get damaged. Since if demolishing the Tomb would set them free, Garfiel would have already done it a long time ago, wouldn’t he?”

The one who followed up on Subaru's deductions was Otto, who was wandering behind him, looking all around the Tomb.

Early in the morning, Otto, who had been sleeping inside the dragon carriage just as he declared he would, got woken up and was bullied by Subaru into coming along to the Tomb on a scouting mission. Naturally, Otto grumbled about it at first, but...

Otto: "Then again, it's rare to get a chance to visit something like the Tomb of the Witch of Greed... maybe coming along would be worth it after all. There's no knowing whether we'll find some treasure belonging to the Witch of Greed along the way. We could make a fortune!"

Subaru: "If you go around announcing that you're selling some Witch-related stuff, won't the over-obsessive guys from the Witch Cult come hunt you down? Sorry I woke you up, that was my bad, geez, but don't go broadcasting it and bring a sea of flames here."

Saying this, trying to save the merchant-souled Otto from himself, Subaru turned back to the Tomb once again. Silence fell all around, and the only sounds remaining, filtering through the trees, were the chirping of insects, and the rustling of leaves caressed by the wind.

A crisp air was flowing through the Sanctuary in the dawn, it was perfect for a morning stroll.

Otto: "Say, we didn't come out here just to breathe the air and go right back, right? If you wanted to enjoy a stroll in the morning, you'd probably have brought Emilia-sama instead of me."

Subaru: "Surprisingly, Emilia-tan's no-good in the mornings. Even though Emilia-tan being groggy after just waking up is dangerously adorable... it'll have to wait until everything's settled down. She's probably still stressed out after the conversations yesterday, I'll let her sleep for a little longer."

Otto: "So, you've got the men together for your skullduggery while the princess is asleep. You, sir, are a wicked one."

Sensing Otto gleefully squinting his eyes at him, Subaru only shrugged. But still, Otto's reading was dead-on. The truth is, it was in order to do something he wouldn't want Emilia to see, that Subaru came to the Tomb.

Otto: “Then, what are we doing? I’m not too confident with my magic abilities, but if it’s using Wind and Water magic to stifle the sound of footsteps or to suddenly hide myself in a flash... Ah, and I can also transfer my footsteps to a completely different location.”

Subaru: “Your magic, sounds like it’s incredibly useful for cat burglars, doesn’t it?”

Otto: “Well, people usually take it the wrong way. But I wouldn’t use it for stealing. I have no qualms about using it to listen-in on conversations, though.”

Seeing Otto bragging this with eyes narrowed and his white teeth all showing, Subaru sighed. Then, lifting a finger in front of the high-spirited Otto, Subaru pointed it toward the Tomb.

Subaru: “I want to take a look inside the Tomb for a bit. If my predictions are correct, the lights inside the Tomb will send me blessings for my future endeavors. If I’m wrong, then I’ll probably keel over and won’t get up, in that case, if you’ll be so good as to pull me out...”

Otto: “What kind of person would just say «Alright, I got it» after listening to that explanation!? Keeling over and won’t get up, what’s that supposed to mean, please stop right there, I’m getting scared now!”

In reaction to Subaru’s super-important announcement, Otto started wailing. But hearing Otto’s complaint, Subaru looked over as if watching an unreasonable child, and,

Subaru: “Listen up, this is the Tomb of the Witch of Greed. Simply put, if you set one foot inside the place without the Witch’s permission your consciousness will be snatched right out with its roots. I got done-in like that yesterday. So, this place is dangerous, don’t you be going in there.”

Otto: “If it didn’t work out yesterday, Natsuki-san shouldn’t be going in either, right? If you know you’re going to keel over why do you still want to go in, it’ll only make a mess of things, let’s not do that. Besides, if it really ends up that way how will I get Natsuki-san out?”

Subaru: “Always questions, questions, coming out one after another... If you keep believing there will be an answer to everything, you’ll be getting into a spoiled mentality, you know.”

Otto: “Please stop trying to gloss things over with sophistries just because it’s too bothersome to explain!”

Having been completely seen through, Subaru smacked his tongue and scowled. Seeing how in the short time they've known each other Otto has already grasped all the tricks in dealing with him, Subaru shook his head dejectedly,

Subaru: "Here, I borrowed some rope from the dragon carriage. I'll tie this around my waist, so if I collapse inside, you can gently, calmly, lovingly pull me out."

Otto: "No matter how gently, calmly, lovingly I pull you, you'll still be getting mud and cuts all over I think."

Subaru: "Well I can't be picky considering the circumstances. Just think of it as repaying a favor."

Otto: "You're the one who owes me a favor, right!?"

While Otto was raising his objection and putting on his grumbling-face, Subaru had already tied the rope around his own waist and handed him the other end. Unwillingly accepting it, Otto carefully inspected the loop around Subaru's waist, and yanked on it just to be sure it was safe. However much he might be complaining, he was still a conscientious person.

Subaru: "Despite being a merchant, you seem really easy to fool... Is it really alright for a guy like you to be doing business?"

Otto: "You know, you seem to have completely forgotten how I'm literally holding your life in my hands right now."

As Subaru looked at him with a motherly gaze, Otto squinted his eyes, tugged on the rope and grumbled. With a wry smile, Subaru gave him a slight bow on the spot, and in the same breath he turned 180 degrees, toward the entrance of the Tomb.

A foul, earthy air was quietly flowing from the Tomb. The morning light of the sun, like the twilight of yesterday's, lit only several meters into the entrance before vanishing entirely. The other end of the tunnel was shrouded in absolute dark, and nothing seemed to have changed from the path that had collapsed the moment he set his foot inside.

Subaru: "Well, it wouldn't actually collapse anyway, I'd just go splat on the first step, so that'd actually make it easier to pull me out, I guess."

Otto: “Natsuki-san, you can go in whenever you’re ready, just give me a signal when you’re going in.”

Subaru: “Alright, I’m going in!”

Subaru had no hesitations in making that decision.

In the worst case, he’d faint and get called by the Witch to another tea party. Although he wasn’t especially looking forward to getting his arm ripped off, punched into healing, and drinking body fluids again—

Subaru: “But compared to all the brink-of-life-and-death stuff so far, it’s not all that baaaa—d!”

Declaring this, Subaru nimbly jumped-off into the entrance of the Tomb.

The threshold—or whatever that might be called, crossing over that boundary between the sunlight and the shadow of the Tomb, Subaru gingerly opened his eyes. Whereas yesterday, his first step had been met instantly by the torment of that weightless sensation—

Subaru: “The ground is solid. I didn’t fall in.”

It’s an improvement from yesterday, and while it was subtle, it was nonetheless a reassuring change. Taking a deep breath, he took another step. And with his second step into the Tomb, Subaru’s body was completely swallowed by the shadows of the ruins. To Otto, waiting outside, Subaru’s figure must have become obscured or perhaps even lost to sight altogether.

Otto: “Natsuki-san, are you alright? If you’re going to faint, please give me a signal like «I’m gonna faint!» while you’re fainting.”

Subaru: “That’s a bit difficult isn’t it... And I wouldn’t want to admit it if I’m going to faint, I’d probably shout something like «I don’t wanna faint!».”

Otto: “What’s with the unnecessary pride in a situation like this!”

Along with their usual exchange, they took some small comfort in confirming each other’s positions through their voices. And, reassured by that sense of relief, Subaru took a third step, and then a fourth.

Otto: “—Oh.”

Subaru: “Ah...”

The next moment, the scene spread out at once in front of Subaru’s eyes.

Rather, in an instant, the shadow was banished from the ruins, and its interiors bared itself for the intruder’s eyes to see. Upon the walls on both sides of the corridor, at about the height of Subaru’s shoulders, lined up in equal and even intervals, the lamps lit up, and with faint, swerving luminescence, lighted the path.

It was a corridor constructed of the same material as the exterior walls, about the width of Subaru’s outstretched arms, or two people walking side-by-side. The height was such that he might bump his head if he jumped. Or, if that giant balding old man was here, there would probably be sparks flying from his scalp scraping against the ceiling as he walked if he doesn’t bend down.

Otto: “...There’s light coming from inside. Is that some kind of condition being met?”

Subaru: “This is a welcoming for someone who’s qualified to take the Trial taking place at night, or so they say... I thought in the worst case I might’ve been just spacing out and daydreaming all of this.”

Once again trying to make sure that what he saw was real, Subaru held up his palms and stared at them. Then, touching himself on the forehead, Subaru recalled the sensation of the touch he had received from her fingertip within the dream.

Subaru: “Looks like I’ve received your souvenir from the tea party all well and good. Even though you pretty much charged me a price for it without my permission... I wasn’t planning on telling anyone for the time being anyway.”

Otto: “Hey I can see inside as well, so then what’ll happen if I come in with you? Can we pillage the Witch of Greed’s Tomb now?”

Subaru: “All I know is that there’s an evil wizard whose whole body got split open when he tried to go in and he’s still recovering from his wounds. What’ll happen to you though, I’m too not sure.”

Otto: “Isn’t that incredibly scary!?”

Listening to Otto getting frightened behind him, Subaru confirmed once more that he had achieved his objective. Although he should be able to venture deeper inside like this, there was a chance that Otto might want to follow in behind him, so Subaru had to abandon that idea for now.

Either way, all that Subaru wanted to do was to confirm that he was qualified for the Trial, and to verify that the words Echidna said to him within the dream could be believed.

In any case, if he could step into the Tomb, then the knowledge and conditions Echidna had given him, along with the payment she extracted, must all have been real. And the same, then, would go for all those Witches that Subaru had met inside that daydream.

Subaru: “If that’s true, then four-hundred years ago, those *goingumaiwei*⁴¹ Witches would’ve been going «hya-ha!» all over the place, wouldn’t they. What must that have been like, at the end of that century... Good thing I got transported into this age, I guess.”

Just the thought of an age wrought by chaos by the Witches of Sin and the Witch of Envy, makes the present age seem pretty reasonable in comparison. Although the atrocities of the Sin Archbishops would offset this somewhat. Still, what a pain in the ass those Witches must have been, every single last one of them.

Subaru: “Anyways, all the preparations on my end are O-K. Now it’s just waiting for nightfall and seeing how Emilia-tan’s Trial turn out. Then let’s maintain a high degree of flexibility, and be ready to adapt to the situation.”

Although it sounded nice, that pretty much meant he had no plans whatsoever. Saying that, Subaru looked back at the Tomb’s entrance once more as he left. Returning to a worried-looking Otto, Subaru untied the rope around his waist and left it next to the entrance.

Subaru: “It might come in handy again, besides, maybe I’ll need it tonight, so I’ll hide it here for now. And sorry for dragging you along, Otto.”

⁴¹ Subaru says “going my way” in Katakana (ゴーイングマイウェイ). Unfortunately, I can’t find a suitable expression for this in English, so I’ll leave it in Romaji. It’s possible, but unlikely, that it is referencing a 1944’s movie called “Going My Way”, which at the very least has a Japanese Wikipedia page.

Otto: “No, that’s alright, as long as you came back safe... but more importantly, aren’t we going back empty-handed? You went in the Tomb but didn’t bring anything back, what did you even go in for?”

Subaru: “I’m having a really hard time figuring out which part of what you just said I should take seriously, but maybe I’ll just take that as your artistic style. I’m not religious or anything, but grave-robbing is still not something I’d do you know?”

It’s not easy to understand why Japan, being an otherwise the irreligious country, manages to revere eight million gods without actually believing in any single one in particular. One could even say it’s the headquarters of the hodgepodge-approach when it comes to religion. Or, it might be just as accurate to call it a collection of cowards being overly wary of ghosts just in case they really exist.

Otto: “Of course all that was just joking around. But if that was all, you didn’t really need me here, did you? Why’d you bring me along?”

Subaru: “Actually, it was somewhat of a gamble whether I could go in or not. So, whether it was getting confused at seeing me falling on my face, or getting traumatized for life after witnessing my body exploding, it’d be best if the victim of that was you...”

Otto: “What kind of selection criteria is that!? And I got more than just a little hunch that was by the process of elimination!”

Subaru: “Dummy, you were the first person that came to mind when I thought about who to trouble. Don’t make me say it out loud, it’s embarrassing.”

Otto: “Any human being should be embarrassed to make that kind of decision!”

Hearing Subaru’s shamelessly dished-out explanation, Otto’s high-pitched retort echoed outwards. Throughout the forest in the morning, reverberating against the ruins, and lingering there, like a regretful conversation with itself. Usually, one would expect the only audience, besides the people present, to be the insects and the animals hidden within the trees, but—

???: “Already so loud so early in the morning, oy. Makin’ a racket right above where a Witch’s sleepin, it’s like «Yohororoi only crows in th’morning», y’know.”

Subaru: “Such a pain in the ass, that Yohororoi. I’ll give him a talking-to next time I see him.”

Saying this, turning his gaze away from Tomb's entrance, Subaru saw, coming from the forest beside him, the one who had cut into their conversation — Scratching his short, golden hair, baring his white fangs, it was Garfiel. And roughly rubbing away the sweat on his forehead,

Garfiel: "I'll say this first, runnin' into ya was a coincidence. Every morning I do a run around the outskirts of the Sanctuary so I just found you guys here. Don't gimme that leery look.

Subaru: "It's not that I'm being wary. Besides, we didn't say anything we can't let other people overhear. Right Otto? Totally, nothing that we can't let other people overhear."

To that feint, or whatever Garfiel's words were supposed to be, Subaru shrugged, and proceeded to violently pat Otto on the shoulder. As if utterly confused at being slapped around, Otto let out a "Uueehh?".

Otto: "E-eehh, yeah that's right, nothing especially troublesome or suspicious or anything like that? Just a little rehearsal for grave-robbing later, just a little rehearsal, that sort of thing!"

Subaru: "Amazing, Otto. I've never seen a man dig his own grave this happily right in front of another grave before."

Seeing the high-spirited Otto suddenly looking like he had no idea what he was saying, Subaru quickly cut him off and stole a glance at Garfiel's reaction. But, judging from Garfiel's expression, it seemed like Otto's confession-of-sorts had completely went in one ear and came out the other.

Garfiel: "What is it, come on, I won't snitch or get angry or anything. Long as you aren't breaking stuff or doing something that's bad for the Sanctuary, I won't have to do anything."

Subaru: "Is that, so. Then I sincerely thank you for that guarantee. It's too bad, even if I want to fight it out, I don't think I stand any chance of winning."

Garfiel: "Eesh, I already feel sorry for ya before even fightin' ya... Kinda wanna say that, but nevermind. It's the same thing whatever opponent I'm lookin' at. I am the strongest, after all."

His eyes beaming, Garfiel said this full of self-satisfaction.

In reality, after having seen first-hand what he was capable of, only an idiot would raise an objection here. But, because he knew Reinhard, whose existence was of an entirely different dimension, he still had the urge to say a word or two about it. But swallowing back what he had wanted to say, Subaru slightly raised his hand with an “Aaalrightey then”,

Subaru: “It should be about time Emilia-tan woke up now, I want to keep her company for her morning studies, so I was just thinking of heading back. You’re in the middle of your morning run too, right? So let’s just...”

Garfiel: “You’re heading to the cathedral, huh. Then I’ll accompany ya.”

As Subaru was hurriedly trying to say goodbyes and go their separate ways, he was cut off by Garfiel’s unexpected proposal. Surprised, Subaru was just about to refuse with a “Naaah”, when,

Garfiel: “Frankly, you should listen to my advice. Besides, you shouldn’t be wanderin’ around the Sanctuary with just you two guys in the first place. There’s no knowin’ what could happen.”

Subaru: “—? What does that mean. That’s an odd way to put it. You made it sound as if it’s dangerous here.”

Garfiel: “That’s why I’m tellin ya, isn’t it—”

Seeing Subaru looking confused as if not understanding his words, Garfiel clacked his teeth with “What’m I gonna do with ya”, and then, drawing near, he continued in a lowered voice,

Garfiel: “Pisses me off to be talking about family troubles, but the residents of the Sanctuary are not all in the same basket.”

Subaru: “What’s, that supposed to mean?”

Garfiel: “If we follow the village-chief Granny’s plan, it’d be taking Roswaal and the humans as hostages and forcing Emilia-sama to take the Trial and break the Witch’s contract or someth’n’ like that. But in reality, only about half the guys are on board with the old hag’s plan... and then there’s also a bunch who aren’t.”

Coming to this point, Garfiel lowered his tone even further.

Garfiel: “For the guys who want to stay holed up in this Sanctuary, you guys being here is a bit of a nuisance. To prevent Emilia-sama from takin’ the Trial, who knows what kind of trouble they’ll stir up.”

Subaru: “Unless you mean... there’s a chance they’ll be turning their fangs on Otto and me?”

Garfiel: “There’s a chance they’ll even use violence on Emilia-sama, I think. Well, it’s like «Even the snorting becomes rough in front of th’hole», y’know? But long as I’m with ya, I won’t let them do anything to bother ya.”

Even though Garfiel said this lightly, Subaru was starting to worry about leaving Emilia behind. Or rather, he was hating himself for not having thought of this possibility earlier.

There was a rift within their mutual understanding between the residents of the Sanctuary headed by Garfiel, and the villagers of Arlam. In that case, why wouldn’t there be internal factions within each of the camps as well?

It’s not like every single one of them would have just raised their hands in agreement with the Sanctuary’s plans. The situation would never progress as one expects them to. Subaru himself was all too aware of that fact.

Subaru: “I have to get back right away...!”

Garfiel: “Aah? I scared ya too much didn’t I? There’s no need to be panickin’, those guys won’t fight among themselves in broad daylight, besides isn’t Emilia-sama in the Cathedral? Who’s gonna do that kind of thing with all those humans runnin’ around? If they wanna get ya, it’ll be pickin’ off someone like this noisy lil’bro here who keeps strayin’ from th’herd.”

Subaru: “Umu... That makes sense. If they go against the will of the majority in plain sight, they’ll only be worsening their own position, won’t they, so they won’t do anything rashly yet...”

His agitation calming down a just little, Subaru breathed a sigh of relief and tried to bring his heart rate under control. Then, suddenly noticing something, he raised his brows once more.

Subaru: “Unless, you thought it’d be dangerous for me and Otto to come out alone, so you came along with us?”

Garfiel: "...Aah?"

Seeing Subaru bending his neck asking this, Garfiel was stumped a moment before he could react. Then, he quickly turned his back so Subaru couldn't see his expression.

Garfiel: "There's no way it's like that. Coincidence. Told ya it was a coincidence!"

Subaru: "See, Otto? That's the proper example of *tsundere*. Yesterday on our first meeting we got to see the fiery and magnificent tsun, and now, isn't the embarrassed and adorable dere just as captivating?"

Otto: "Ennnn actually, having personally gotten a taste of the tsun on my forehead yesterday, it's still a little hard to accept, but surprisingly, somehow I get the feeling he isn't a very bad person, I can't deny that it feels as if my manly heart is being deceived."

Subaru: "Uwa, you're really easy to trick you know."

Otto: "I've been set up!!!"

As Otto's ludicrous wail resounded through the forest in the morning, the frightened birds spread their wings and took to the sky.

The noisy Otto on the one hand, and the really hard-to-hate Garfiel on the other. Being together with these two like this, for the first time since coming to this parallel world, Subaru felt like he's acquired some bad companions he could actually be with as equals, in the truest sense of the word.

Subaru: "Well, I'm pretty easy as well."

And, relaxing his cheeks, Subaru ever so slightly smiled.

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Awaiting the coming of night, standing in front of the entrance of the Tomb, Subaru now felt a dark wind upon his skin that was very different from the crisp wind of the morning.

Emilia: "Now that it's night, it really does feel like a Tomb. It's even more ominous than yesterday."

Staring at the tomb's entrance as she said this, her silver hair swaying in the wind, it was Emilia. Playing with the end of her three-stranded braid, she stole a glance at Subaru,

Emilia: "Do you think it's, ok to go in now?"

Subaru: "If they had stuck a sign on the entrance that said «We open at seven o' clock» then it'd be easier to tell, but looks like they didn't do that... If the Trial starts roughly around nightfall, once it's dark all around that should be a good enough range I think."

Emilia: "Yeah. Alright, I'll go in then."

With a light sigh, even as she was saying this, Emilia still seemed unable to make up her mind. At her side, waiting for her to gather up her courage, Subaru turned back his head to look behind him.

There were four other people besides Subaru who came to send Emilia into the Trial. There was Garfiel and Ryuzu of the Sanctuary-team, there was Roswaal's representative, Ram, and then, there's the not-quite-sure-why-he's-here, Otto. But then, if we add him to Emilia and Subaru of the Emilia faction, they would be considered the largest faction here.

Subaru: "But on the other hand, if we count the whole Sanctuary, then we're easily the smallest faction here. Come to think of it, life could be getting a lot harder from now on."

Emilia: "What are you mumbling about? It's reeeeaally getting to me..."

Subaru: "Oh I'm just talking to myself. Emilia-tan, you just focus on getting ready for what's ahead. Although, to be honest, since I wasn't able to find out about the contents of the Trial it's getting me really worried..."

Emilia: "Not knowing the contents, it's the same for anyone who challenged the Trial so far, right? I shouldn't be sneaky and start cheating when it's my turn. Even with the same conditions, I'll try my best."

Seeing Emilia tightening her little fist, pumping herself up, Subaru quickly held up a hand in front of his eyes like he's shielding it from a radiant light. Now, the way he was trying to get a Witch to help him cheat right off the bat was really coming off as sneaky in comparison. Because, compared to himself, how pure and noble Emilia is...

Subaru: “EMK⁴²! It’s too much!”

Emilia: “Oh, it’s been awhile since I heard Subaru say that.”

Starting with a small giggle, Emilia’s expression broke down as she heard Subaru’s old catchphrase. Seeing her smile, Subaru decided that the joke was still worth keeping around after all, and nodded,

Subaru: “Anyway, I don’t know what kind of things are in there, but if you sense any kind of danger just cry out. If you call my name, I will fly right over to your side.”

Emilia: “If you come in, won’t you go «pa-tan» right away?”

Subaru: “It’s been awhile since I heard someone call it going «pa-tan»...”

Seeing Emilia pouting up her lips, just as Subaru started objecting and scratching his face, “But”, Emilia continued,

Emilia: “Thank you for worrying about me. Puck still hasn’t shown his face at all, so I am reeeaaally getting worried. And I feel like I’m completely relying on Subaru now.”

Subaru: “Then you can rest your ultra-dummy weight against me, you know. Emilia-tan is light as a feather, and if I don’t touch you from time to time to make sure you’re still there, I’ll get really worried.”

Emilia: “But, somehow, I get the feeling that wiggly thing you’re doing with your fingers is really gross.”

Seeing Subaru endlessly wiggling his fingers, Emilia smiled wryly. And, with her nervousness unraveling, she did a little stretch that made herself seem a little taller.

Emilia: “Somehow, I feel like my shoulders have gotten a little lighter. Ever since the first time we met, that was what Subaru had been aiming for, wasn’t it?”

⁴² Emilia-tan Maji Kishidou (エミリアたん・マジ・騎士道), translated as “Emilia is seriously chivalrous”.

Subaru: “If I had that kind of first-rate *chiryō*⁴³ abilities, I wouldn’t be the kind of lonely boy who spends his time learning origami to such mastery as to be able to make *rindougurumas*⁴⁴.”

He took a certain pride in having reached the extremes of that art that flows out of one’s fingertips. Although, there was really no one he could show it to other than his parents.

Listening to Subaru’s drab remarks about his past, Emilia adorably tilted her head a little to show her lack of understanding. But seeing her alright now, and so completely cute, Subaru crossed his arms and nodded. And with that expression of not-understanding still on her face, Emilia turned toward the Tomb.

Emilia: “—This time, I’m really going. So pray for my safe return.”

Subaru: “I’ll be praying until the Buddha’s ears bleed.”

Sending her off with these words, he watched Emilia’s back vanishing into the Tomb. Then, beginning from the entrance, one-by-one the lights lit up, just as it did for Subaru when he entered in the morning.

And just like this, Emilia’s footsteps trailed on, into the depths of the Tomb. It seemed that the Trial would be taking place deep within that corridor. Even further than what Subaru could have seen in the morning when he strained his eyes trying to see the end.

Ryuzu: “Worry’s written all over your face, kiddo.”

Then, walking up beside Subaru, who had worry all over his eyes, it was a little girl — or the full grown adult living inside what looked like one — Ryuzu, who called out to him. Unbefitting of her cute and childish features, what was adorning her face was a somehow aged and ancient smile,

Ryuzu: “It’ll be alright, there’s no need to worry. The Trial, or whatever exaggerated name you call it, is not life-threatening or anything.”

Subaru: “You know about the contents of the Trial, then?”

⁴³ English flip. Means “treatment/cure” (治療), originally “セラピスタ” (therapeutic).

⁴⁴ A type of origami (paper folding) that resembles the flower *Gentiana scabra*, found in Japan. Seems like not a lot of people are able to make these origamis.

Ryuzu: “I have taken part in it myself. Being half-blood and qualified, it was only natural. Although in the end, I did not pass... See, I’m still well and kicking about.”

Ryuzu did a little hop on the spot to show that she was still healthy. And seeing her trying to use that almost adorable gesture to wipe away his anxiety, from deep within his heart, Subaru appreciated her consideration, and,

Subaru: “Then, is that how you got to become a loli on the outside and a fast-aging granny on the inside? If Emilia-tan becomes loli Emilia-tan it’ll be really cute too, but would Emilia-tan really like that?”

Ryuzu: “I must have been stupid to have taken you seriously enough to not expect a reply like that. You know, Su-bo, you’re just like Gar-bo, and don’t know how to respect your elders at all.”

Subaru: “What gave you that idea? Actually, I feel much better now. I made you worried about me there, sorry about that.”

Seeing Subaru lowering his head, Ryuzu sighed shaking her head “Why didn’t you just say that in the first place”, and pretended to wipe away non-existent tears with her long, wrist-less sleeves.

Waiting, and watching all this from the side, Garfiel crossed his arms with a grossed-out expression, then quietly turned, to gaze at the Tomb. Surprisingly, Otto and Ram seem to have struck up a conversation about something and seem to have established a certain degree of friendly understanding. For Subaru, who had very little experience in friendly conversation with Ram, witnessing this sight was actually an extremely big deal.

“I’ll need to do something about this. I better ask Otto to teach me the specific techniques of talking to Ram without setting her off.”, Subaru quietly swore to himself in his heart, before turning his attention to the Tomb once again.

Without realizing it, he had found himself with his hands in front of his waist, rubbing his thumb against each other as if he was praying. It was painful, not to be able to do anything but wait. Compared to being left behind and waiting like this, it would have been easier if he just took the Trial himself.

But just as this conceited notion flashed across his mind, along with it, a change came about before him.

Everyone: “———!”

Seeing this change, in the same moment everyone present gasped. Repeatedly blinking, like a conditioned response adjusting to the darkness after losing the only source light, in any case,

Subaru: “The Tomb’s lights went out!?”

Ryuzu: “While the Trial is still ongoing the lights should stay on...”

Subaru: “You mean they’re not supposed to go out!?”

Looking toward Ryuzu who was supposed to know everything, even her wise little eyes seemed confused at this. It was more than enough to tell him that the situation wasn’t within their expectations.

Whether it was Garfiel, unfolding his arms and running over, Ram, who was furrowing her brows, or the panicking Otto, it seemed no one had any advice to offer. In that case,

Ryuzu: “Su-bo!? You don’t have the Qualification, it won’t let you in...”

Subaru: “I’ve been paying good attention to the lectures, so I got the Qualifications too, you know—
Now let me have look inside. No matter how Emilia-tan is, I’ll pull her out!”

He will not stand by and wait.

The same moment when Subaru fearlessly stepped into the entrance, the lights of the corridor lit up once more just like when Emilia had entered. Sensing Ryuzu and Garfiel gasping behind him, before they could say anything to stop him, Subaru had already dashed into the Tomb.

The corridor was still filled with dust, and a single breath was enough to bring discomfort to the lungs.

His echoing footsteps striking loudly upon the floor, Subaru charged into the depth of the corridor — into the depths of the Tomb.

Subaru: “Damnit, I messed up. Why did I keep myself back like some trump card until something went wrong, I should have just gone in together with Emilia... Aaaaaaah—!”

With regret pouring out of his lips, Subaru ran.

Then, suddenly, as he saw the light reaching the end of the corridor, he had arrived inside a small room.

Sliding to halt his steps, Subaru looked around the little chamber. While it could be called a room, it was more like a grotesque rectangular space with four corners carved out. Without any furnishing, there was only a single door adorned by cyan-white lamps.

—And, on the floor in front of that door, was a silver haired girl lying there.

Subaru: “—Emilia!!”

Crying out, Subaru dashed over to her fallen body. Holding up her delicate form in his arms, no matter what, he will take her out of here—

???: “—First, you must face your past.”

The next moment, a sensation of something whispering beside his ear struck his consciousness. What could that voice be, there was no time for that thought.

Falling on his knees, unable to move, Subaru's body collapsed like a doll. Rolling onto the floor from the momentum, he sprawled out upon the ground at Emilia's side.

Then, lying beside the unconscious Emilia, Subaru's consciousness too, was dragged into oblivion—

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—Beginning to wake from his slumber, Subaru sucked in the breath as if sticking his head out of the surface of the water. It was that sensation of emerging out of an ocean of sleep, yearning for reality like a body yearning for air—

???: “*Ohaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa—yo, musuko*⁴⁵!!”

Subaru: “WAAAAHammurabi ho-ten⁴⁶!!”

This poetic morning greeting struck him with an all-destructive impact.

⁴⁵ “Good mooooooooooooooooorning, son!”

⁴⁶ Reference to the Code of Hammurabi, for some damn reason (for more information, see [here](#)).

Tasting the pain of a weight pressing down on him and squeezing all the air out of his gut, Subaru's just-woken-up body jumped itself out of bed along with all that weight, before descending into a vicious bout of coughing.

???: “Oyoyoy, what’s this what’s this. It’s only the usual *divingu pressu*⁴⁷ of love to wake you up. Your carelessness is *moeruteiru*⁴⁸ this time!”

Subaru: “Gahkehk, what did you expect... from a sleeping opponent... Come on.”

What on earth has happened? He lifted up his face with tears in his eyes. And there, the person standing in front of Subaru's half-stuck out body turned around his head,

Kenichi: “What’s that now. You look like you’ve just seen your middle-aged dad fully-naked first thing in the morning, you!”

That man, saying this while striking out a pose, was Subaru's middle-aged father half-naked in the morning—

Natsuki Kenichi, heartily laughing, blessing his son out of his slumber.

⁴⁷ Subadad gives us an English expression that doesn't work if translated.

⁴⁸ English flip. Means “burning” (燃えている), originally “バーニング” (burning).



Arc 4 Chapter 16 - A Morning in the Natsuki Household

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 10, Chapter 4 “Parent and Child”, Parts 1-2

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Complete](#)

“Hahaha”, listening to that deafening laugh, Subaru gave his head a light shake to cast away the last bit of his drowsiness. He was always rather proud of being able to wake up in an instant, but being forced awake by an outside force was a different matter.

As though the blood still hadn’t returned to his brain, Subaru rubbed his eyelids that were slightly aching, then hazily looked around at his surroundings — When his old familiar room flooded into his sight.

The shelves were packed full of manga and light novels, sloppily yanked-off jeans and jerseys were strewn all over the floor. The study-desk that hadn’t been used for its proper purpose in ages was piled up with half-read books, and there was the ancient TV-with-recording-functionality that was now exclusively used for gaming, whose very existence elicited sympathy from anyone who looked at it.

Lying on a futon that hadn’t been dried in the sun for ages, cracking the joints of his neck, for some reason, Subaru couldn’t help but feel a sense of incongruity in front of this familiar landscape—

And just what could that rustling in his chest be?

Kenichi: “Oooy oy, being ignored will even make an old guy like me wanna cry, you know? It’s a fresh and sunny morning, so get carried along by the mood and jump like *dowowowong* and you’re up!”

Subaru: “You mean, welcome the morning feeling refreshed and invigorated after getting woken up by a diving press? Stop it with the jokes, come on. It’s more like «I think I hear my bones making a noise now, I better go back to sleep and heal up».”

Turning down the attempt to wake him up, once again Subaru tugged himself back into the futon. Seeing Subaru turning his back to him and leaving no room for negotiations, the one standing up beside the futon started making a displeased “*Nani nani nani~*⁴⁹” noise,

Kenichi: “It’s the rebellious stage! The rebellious stage isn’t it!? I always knew this day will come, but I didn’t think it’d come this morning, I’m not prepared yet! Instead of preparing breakfast I should have prepared a good proper talk with my son! Damn it, I hate to be so powerless...”

Subaru: “If you’re saying that, why’re you still grabbing onto my leg... Oy, wait, ow! Oooowowowowow!”

Kenichi: “Aaaaaaaaalright, I’ve decided to have a good talk you with all the way till tomorrow morning. First is body language! Figure four, figure four⁵⁰! There, it’s good for waking up the joints isn’t it!”

His legs being twisted into a figure-four leglock, Subaru flapped around to the other side while Kenichi dealt critical-damage to his knees and shins. And the louder Subaru wailed in agony, the more heartily Kenichi laughed, as though overwhelmed by the joys of life.

Kenichi: “OHO, what’s this what’s this. All grown up and exercising every day, aren’t you embarrassed to have such a hard time against a middle-aged old man? Mwahahaha... OW, wait, ow! Hurtshurtshurtshurts!”

Subaru: “Fool! Choosing to use the easily countered four-figure leglock as your attack, dad must be getting old! Turning my body, I’ll return the damage in equal force, taking vengeance on the one who got me in this figure-four leg... Ow, wait, don’t flip don’t flip... Owow! Owowowowow!”

With arms and legs stretched out, the two grown men tangled each other up in their back and forth rumbling. Each time, the assailant and victim exchanged places to let out their shrieks of agony, while their commotion sent books flopping off the desk and knocked the game-station falling to its side.

And just as their morning father and son brawl was going on in full force—

???: “—Hold it a minute you two. Mom’s getting hungry you know, I kind of wanna eat breakfast.”

⁴⁹ Engrish flip. Means “なに” (what), originally “な—” (What is this).

⁵⁰ Wrestling for a joint-lock that resembles the number four, hurts like a bitch (for more information, see [here](#))

Listening to the sound of that leisurely voice and that offbeat knocking in the room, their alternating attacks on each other's joints halted in place.

Half crying from the pain, in the corner of Subaru's murky vision, he saw the person standing in the doorway of the room — It was a woman with a certain absent-minded atmosphere about her, standing there with a vicious-looking gaze. While at first sight, the sharpness of her gaze might give off the impression that she was in a bad mood, in reality, after having known her for over seventeen years, Subaru knew that she wasn't actually thinking about anything in particular.

Just by their dangerous-looking eyes, it was be enough to tell that they were mother and son, for she was Subaru's mother, Natsuki Naoko. With Mom showing up, Kenichi let out a "Oh crap!", and stuck out his tongue and jumped himself up,

Kenichi: "My bad my bad, I got too carried away with my intimate-time with Subaru⁵¹. But you could've eaten first if you want."

Naoko: "—? But families eat together in the morning, how could I eat first? Isn't it better when everyone eats together?"

Confused by Kenichi's words, Naoko tilted her head with a question mark floating above her head. It's not that she was mocking him or anything, it seemed more like she was just saying exactly what she was thinking. Seeing his wife like that, Kenichi vigorously nodded his head,

Kenichi: "Aha, is that so. That's the woman I married! Alright I understand. Breakfast tastes better when everyone's eating together!"

Naoko: "Breakfast lunch or dinner, I don't think that really changes the taste, does it? It's just when everyone eats together, we can clean all the dishes in one go."

Kenichi: "Aw. You meant dishes. Sorry, I got myself all pumped up there."

⁵¹ Translation note by SummaryAnon: "Kenichi and Naoko refer to Subaru using his kanji writing, (昴). The narration continues to use the katakana version (スバル). A font change indicates that the kanji writing has been used."

Hearing that natural explanation, the face of the one who looked like he had just said a really good line slumped down. Drooping his shoulders, Kenichi looked at Naoko with an incredulous expression, but Naoko only continued staring at Subaru, who was still lying there like that.

Naoko: “You come to eat too, Subaru. I worked hard for Subaru’s breakfast this morning, after all.”

And then, she gave him a faint and cheerful smile, in a way that only those closest to her could understand.

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—Rubbing his sleepy eyes as he begrudgingly made his way down to the dining table on the first floor, Subaru’s hazy consciousness was suddenly awoken by the impact of a certain smell.

Subaru: “Mom... Even though you said you worked hard to make this for me...”

Naoko: “Mhm. Mom worked really hard for Subaru. I’ve been up and about preparing this since the morning.”

“Fufu”, Naoko was proudly exhaling from her nose for some reason. Unable to pick up any trace of a guilty conscience in that attitude, Subaru sighed.

Following behind Subaru’s sigh, coming back from the bathroom and taking a look at the dining table, Kenichi let out a sort of “Oh”, with an exclamation mark on top of it.

Kenichi: “That’s cool, Subaru. You got a special menu on your plate. It’s like a green forest.”

Subaru: “Thanks for pointing that out. Uh, it really does feel like that... What’s, going on with this, exactly? How come only my plate has got a luxuriant pile of green peas plopped on it?”

Nodding at Kenichi’s observation, Subaru pointed to the pile — Laid in front of his usual seat, beside the rest of the breakfast, the dish had a certain eerie atmosphere floating about it. There was a giant pile of green peas stacked up as if trying to avenge the death of its family members, and it was unclear whether it completely buried all other food underneath so that only peas were visible, or there wasn’t any other food on that plate in the first place. Just as a side-note, Subaru hated peas.

Naoko: “Well, some time ago Subaru mentioned hating green peas, right? Mom thought it’s not good to be picky with your food. So, I took this opportunity to let you eat looooots of it so you can overcome it.”

Subaru: “So you just recalled a random memory from «some time ago» and decided to fix my bad habit, huh. And what opportunity... It’s not a special day or anything, right?”

Kenichi: “Fufu, you’re still green, Subaru. Alright listen up, no matter what time it is, this day, and this moment of this day can only ever be experienced here and now. You may think that there will always be another day exactly like this one again, but by doing so you will have allowed countless moments to escape...”

Subaru: “That’s, enough for now.”

Pushing Kenichi, who had casually danced himself into the conversation, aside, Subaru let out a deep, drawn out sigh, and got into his seat. Then, pushing the plate with the heap of peas away from himself,

Subaru: “Anyways, I appreciate the thought of especially preparing this for me, but I’ll pass on the peas. I don’t want to fill up my stomach with something I hate first thing in the morning.”

Naoko: “There you are with that again. Then, if there’s nothing left to eat in the world except green peas, what will you do. You’ll eat them then, won’t you?”

Subaru: “In that kind of world, we’ll all die of nutritional imbalance pretty soon anyway, so it’s not like eating the peas would do much good. So, I will absolutely not eat it.”

Replying to Naoko’s crummy argument with one of his own, Subaru folded his arms and pumped up his chest,

Subaru: “Even if Armageddon came down, I will absolutely not eat peas.”

Kenichi: “Gees, you’ll lose out on life if you’re picky with food like this. Oh, mom, I’ll trade you the tomato in my salad, I don’t like ’em so you eat ’em for me.”

Subaru: “That’s just my father... Doesn’t skip a beat in contradicting the first half of his sentence with the second half.”

Dad placed his reviled tomatoes into mom's salad and pilfered some of mom's egg-pieces in return. Since it was their regular exchange, no one complained about this quiet understanding between husband and wife. Glancing to his side, Subaru turned to the rest of the breakfast besides the peas: in front of the steaming miso soup, and the honey-toast with an extravagant amount of honey on it, Subaru clapped his hands together,

Subaru: "Come to think of it, why the East-West combination?"

Naoko: "Mom had a bunch of kelp for the miso soup, and loves honey on bread."

That wasn't really an answer.

But it was too much of a bother to point that out. Even if he does raise an objection here, he'll probably only get Naoko tilting her head as a reply.

Subaru quietly said "Itadakimasu" as he brought the miso soup to his lips, and Kenichi and Naoko sat down into their respective seats as well — neatly opposite from Subaru's. The two also clapped their hands together with an "Itadakimasu", and then, with the same exact motion, they sipped at their miso soup. No one noticed it, but the three of them did it together in a perfectly synchronized pattern.

Kenichi: "Oooh, this miso soup... Mom, did your cooking get better while I wasn't looking?"

Naoko: "You noticed? Actually, yesterday I recorded a three-minute cooking show, you know."

So, what about that.

Listening to Naoko's out-of-tune reply to Kenichi's all too convenient prompt, Subaru's face started twitching. Judging from how Naoko always said things exactly as they are, when she said "recorded", she probably did just that and only recorded it without actually watching it. And then, most likely, just left it there without ever watching it. In fact,

Subaru: "Considering what dad let slip earlier in the morning, the miso soup and toast was all made by dad, wasn't it?"

Kenichi: “Oyoy, sharp-eyes, my son. So you’ve noticed... the contradictions in the testimony and raised your «OBJECTION!»⁵² based on the evidence?”

Subaru: “Why are you still addicted to that ancient game in this day and age!? Although yes, that was totally a classic!”

He must have taken the Game Boy from Subaru’s table or something. It must have been great for killing time in between work... but just imagining the sight of a middle-aged old man leaning in on a Game Boy made Subaru’s back itch. And, chewing on the sweet toast while saying this, Subaru went on with “By the way...”

Subaru: “What time is it now, dad, why are you still so scantily clad? Sure it’s almost getting warm soon, but no matter what, going around in just a running-shirt and long underpants is taking casual a bit too far, isn’t it?”

Kenichi: “Aren’t you in your long underpants too? Besides, dad’s just like that you know, waking up early in the morning I got in a good mood⁵³ so I went down to the yard for a dry-towel rub-down or something.”

Subaru: “Dry-towel rub-down, isn’t that something that only helps when it’s cold out?”

Kenichi: “That’s just a motivational problem! If you get too caught up with that kind of concerns before setting out, you’ll never get where you want to go. Come on, mom, back me up here.”

Naoko: “That’s right, Subaru. Since it’s not cold out, I used a really cold gaze to stare at your dad while he’s doing his rub-down, you know.”

Kenichi: “That!? Honey, that wasn’t backing me up at all!?”

Naoko: “Ehh... Wasn’t that backing you up? It was a really really cold stare you know.”

Kenichi: “That’s not a back-up, that’s a deathblow!!”

⁵² Ace Attorney reference.

⁵³ Says “tension” in English (テンション), which colloquially means “good mood”.

Seeing Kenichi swinging back and forth creaking his chair to demonstrate his displeasure, Naoko only made the off-beat comment “That’s going to get the dust flying, I’ll have to clean that up later”.

Watching his parents like this, Subaru lowered his eyes and continued to eat his breakfast. Then, Subaru pushed the plate of green peas in front of Kenichi, and since Kenichi hated them too, he pushed it in front of Naoko, and Naoko pushed it back to Subaru again, completing the vicious cycle.

Subaru: “Looks like we’ve got a pattern where definitely nobody is going to eat these. What’re we gonna do, we got this huge pile of peas. Here, you eat these, mom, take responsibility.”

Naoko: “But, mom hates green peas...”

Subaru: “Then what were you doing trying to get other people to overcome their pickiness!?”

Naoko: “Ah, but don’t misunderstand. Mom doesn’t just hate green peas... It’s little round things in general. It’s really gross to put them in my mouth.”

Subaru: “What misunderstanding, that just made you sound less and less credible!”

Actually, he had never seen his mother put anything pea-shaped in her mouth before, so thinking this, he pushed the plate toward Kenichi this time.

Subaru: “Then, the wife’s responsibility is the husband’s to take, so dad you eat it.”

Kenichi: “Don’t say something that sounds so lonely, Subaru. We’re a close and friendly family that’s really rare these days, right? That means if you and mom hate it, I hate it too.”

Subaru: “It’s making nobody happy and is just a load of trouble, this green plate!”

They’re green peas that nobody wants to put in their mouths. At last, it was Kenichi who made the decision “We could mix it into pilaf as a last resort. We attack it with so much rice and meat that it disappears, heheheh!” with a mad scientist look on his face.

If it was mixed it into something else, then Subaru would probably find it a bit more tolerable, but Naoko still maintains that gross things are still gross whatever they’re mixed into. So in the end, it was the two men who got stuck with eating the concoction.

Subaru: “—I’m full.”

Kenichi: “*Hai*, Osumatsu-san⁵⁴. Alright, wash your dishes really quick, time to get everything digested and get ready for the competitions at school, Subaru.”

Subaru: “I’m already tired of hearing these fluent patterns to push me back to school. In fact, I don’t remember being raised as the kind of brat who runs off as soon as he’s done eating.”

Placing the dishes into the sink, Kenichi turned back and flashed his teeth. But seeing this, Subaru shrugged and got up from the dining table. And leaving behind in a quiet voice, “I’ll sleep till noon”, scratching at his head, he made his way toward his bedroom on the second floor—

—Then, his legs suddenly stopped.

Subaru: “Wha-, t’s...?”

Feeling a pain running through his temples, Subaru lightly pressed his head and closed his eyes. A dazzling light was flashing behind his closed eyelids. A scalding heat was burning deep inside his throat.

Something was wrong. Something strange was happening.

Looking back, Subaru saw his parents’ faces.

Kenichi’s lips were pouted up, disappointed at his invitation being turned down, and Naoko was wiping the dining table with a cloth, watching Subaru with a lonely look in her eyes.

Facing his father and mother’s gazes — noticing the emotions they carried, Subaru could no longer ignore the torture of the heat inside his chest. Feeling his face burning up, hastily turning his back so they could not see his expression, Subaru ran away—

—Rather, he ran into his own bedroom.

Subaru: “What is this? Why, why am I feeling like this?”

⁵⁴ Osumatsu-san (anime) reference.

Holding his chest, Subaru was panting, surprised by the speed his own pulse. Dropping onto the futon like he was collapsing, he restlessly turned his eyes all around the room.

His room was the same as when woke up. Nor was it any different from the room where he fell asleep the night before. Just as it had always been, no change had befallen this room as it continued in its stagnation.

Like a perfect projection, of the stagnation of its master, Subaru.

Looking at the clock, it was eight in the morning. School starts at eight-thirty, it takes about twenty minutes from his house on bike. It's not impossible to get there in time.

Nevertheless, Subaru did not move to change, but only hugged his knees on top of the futon, still staring at the movements of the clock hand. Second by second, the second-hand ticked, until quietly, the minute-hand ticked its tenth — The deadline had passed.

—He could no longer make it to school today.

Subaru: “So there's, nothing I can do. That's right, there's nothing I can do.”

If there had been a little more time for him to gather his resolve, perhaps he would have gone. But reality had heartlessly imposed a time limit on Subaru.

Therefore, there was no longer a choice for him today. Yet even so,

Subaru: “...Usually, I should have calmed down by now. What's going on?”

His heartbeat wouldn't settle, his ragged breathing showed no sign of steadying. Confused by what was happening to his body, Subaru was frightened even by the sound of his own teeth clacking.

—For Subaru, this time of every morning was the most terrifying time of the day.

Subaru: “Calm down, calm down... The time had passed. It's alright to calm down now. It's alright.”

Pressing his shivering body, again and again Subaru told this to himself. It was time that this harrowing daily ritual ended. Tomorrow morning, at the exact same time, he will be met with the exact same horror again, but at least he has overcome it for today. No one was there to rush him, and no one was

there to force him. The only person haunting him, drilling that anxiety into his heart, was no one but Subaru himself.

Whether or not to go to school — That choice alone was forcing this time of anguish upon Subaru.

Having refused to go, having been an absentee-truant for so long, unable to face up to his own weakness, now, it was only a matter of adding wrong on top of wrong.

Waiting for time to pass in the torture of his own self-loathing and inferiority complex, until, confirming that the chance to go to school was already gone, he would be liberated for the remainder of the day to be spent in slothfulness.

Precisely because he had experienced this agony day-after-day, he knew more than anyone what the relief of the liberation felt like. Clinging onto his own weakness, he could do nothing but to continue to find excuses, however grotesque they may be.

Yet, granting absolutely all of that, the time should have already passed—

Subaru: “But why only today...”

His sense of guilt, of self-loathing, his unease stuck tight onto him, refusing to disappear.

Unable to understand the source of that anxiety making him want to tear his chest open, not even his breathing can be relied on as he lay drenched in sickening sweat, writhing in agony on top of his futon.

All this time branded into his mind; his parents’ faces as he left the dining table would not leave him.

The familiar expressions, the familiar conversations, the familiar bickering, the familiar betrayal, the familiar sloth — That’s how it should have been. But only today, that same familiar routine, that had already happened so many times before, was tormenting his heart to no end.

—Thinking back, ever since the moment he woke up this morning, something had felt amiss.

His father Kenichi had always been thinking up all sorts of ingenious ways to harass Subaru out of sleep. After Subaru started refusing to go to school, even after he had become a failure in every sense of the word, his father did not change the way he treated him. Indeed, even the interactions this morning were

the same as they had always been for the past seventeen years — Then what could be so special about this morning, that something besides the “diving press” should now be causing this pain inside his chest?

While his mother Naoko’s misdirected tenderness was almost always overwhelmingly ineffectual, she would always put Subaru first. With Subaru holed up in the house, the dedicated housewife Naoko naturally had plenty of time to spend with him. But even so, as if leaving it all to time, she continued to watch over Subaru from a distance with her constant and gentle gaze — In the dining areas, he would often notice that gaze without intending to.

He could not understand why, even now, after the time to leave for school had already passed, the agitation was still burning in his body.

Subaru: “Something’s wrong. What’s going on? What’s happened? Surely yesterday was...”

Thinking back on what he did the day before, racking his brain to think of what could have happened between then and this morning — a numbing sensation stopped him.

As though fiery sparks were flying from the depths of his eyes, each time, a scalding heat surged up, as if to reject Subaru’s attempt to touch that memory. Incredulous, Subaru tried once more to challenge the sea of memories, and once again he failed. No matter how he tried, the response was be the same.

Yesterday, or the day before, or even further before that, Subaru had passed the days without having done anything. As for the pain in his chest this moment, this morning, he could not think of anything out of the ordinary that could explain it.

It must have been a coincidence, that he felt the guilt and pain more intensely today. Until today, he hadn’t truly paid attention to his parents’ faces, and that, overlapping with everything else, must have been why.

Kenichi: “—Miiiiiiind if I come in, Subaru?”

And, as even that conclusion failed to ease Subaru’s sickness in the slightest, he heard a voice coming in from the other side of the door.

Turning his eyes to the door, he saw Kenichi peeping in with half his body before smoothly gliding himself into the room. With agile footwork almost reminiscent of the King of Pop⁵⁵, as he completed his glide—

Subaru: “If you come in before the other person answers, what’s the point of even knocking?”

Kenichi: “Oyoy, with the firm bond of father and son between us, there’s no reason to bicker about minor details like knocking, right? ...Oh wait, there is. That’s right, occasionally young men in puberty might want to do something that require holing themselves up in a room alone. OK I got it. I’ll come back in ten minutes or so.”

Subaru: “Don’t just jump to random conclusions and then set aside realistic time frames for them! It’s alright, nothing’s going on!”

Shouting out the assurance that there was no need for that kind of consideration, although Subaru was snorting roughly, deep down he was relieved by the distraction. Hearing Subaru’s reply, Kenichi let out a “Really?” with a suspicious-looking expression, before turning around and doing a moonwalk right back into the room. And, turning to face his son, who was staring up at him, right then and there he did a pose with his finger pointing up toward the ceiling.

Kenichi: “Then, Subaru. Well it’s pretty self-evident I guess, but truth is I have a day-off today.”

Subaru: “Hm, I already noticed. Still helping with housework this late on a Monday morning, even I would have noticed it. So, what about it.”

Kenichi: “Well, don’t be so eager to rush to the ending. There are just, some things I wanted to talk about, so, this is an opportunity to talk about all of them, or something, isn’t it?”

Subaru: “Talk about what? Like washing my own dishes after eating?”

Kenichi: “Well that too. Dad hates washing dishes you know. It’s fun doing the preparations and cooking so I like that lot, but after that I lose my motivation.”

⁵⁵ Reference to moonwalking, as popularized by Michael Jackson.

The already wobbling Kenichi crumbled. Seeing his usually overactive father like this, Subaru furrowed his brows, and couldn't help but sense that his father was somehow hesitating about something.

Avoiding the main subject, joking around to buy enough time to gather up resolve in both of their hearts — and not doing a very good job of it, Subaru had the exact same personality as well.

Of course, the resemblance was only natural.

Subaru: “—hurts.”

The moment he thought this, the piercing pain struck Subaru's head once again. A pain like pins planting themselves into his temples, feeling as if the bones inside of his skull were being scraped, Subaru turned down his face to hide his agonized expression.

Subaru: “So, what is it? That my unmotivated dad wants to talk to me about.”

Kenichi: “Oh, right. Subaru, is there a girl you like?”

Subaru: “—I'm in high-school!!”

Prompting the conversation to cover up the pain, he overreacted to the question that was so stupid that it made him forget he was in pain in the first place.

Seeing Subaru lifting up his face angrily, Kenichi waved both his arms around “Oooh~ ooooooh~”,

Kenichi: “With an overreaction like that, you might as well be admitting to having a girl you like, you know.”

Subaru: “What're you saying with that smug look on your face. Even if I am dumbstruck, lamenting, or sighing it still wouldn't mean a thing.”

And in reality, that wasn't the case anyway.

Chasing girls was not the sort of thing Subaru was interested in right now. He didn't have one, and he couldn't get one even if he wanted to. That was what he firmly believed, at least.

Kenichi: “Whaaa, that’s no fun. Did you try the advice dad gave you when you were little? Girls are weak to *bamen*⁵⁶ involving promises that span years into the future, so if you kept getting potential girls to promise themselves to you ten years later, you’d be setting up the *fukusen*⁵⁷ in advance for your conquest routes once you’re in your teens.”

Subaru: “Yeah, and then I was naïve enough to actually believe that, and really went around making pinky promises with girls all over the place, and now the whole region has got a ban on pinky promises. Apparently because there were too many cases involving this scary-faced kid forcing little girls to swallow-a-thousand-needles!”

Kenichi: “...Well, it’s a good thing you inherited that sweet mask from your dad. You got the short legs, your mom’s eyes, your dad’s *tenshon*, and your mom’s absent-mindedness, it’s like all the stat allocations when you came out of your mom’s belly got screwed up.”

Subaru: “You should have told me that while I was still on the umbilical cord...”

Reminiscing together on those painful memories, the tension between the father and son eased a little. And, noticing that they’ve gotten sidetracked, with a “So?” Subaru returned to the topic,

Subaru: “What was it you wanted to talk about? After we’re done, I still have the important mission of my second nap and my third nap to attend to, so please leave a message after the beep and quietly exit the room and go chat about it with mom.”

Kenichi: “Don’t boot me out with that natural flow now... Besides, your mom wouldn’t actually get it. My wife, and your mom, is the most un-observant lifeform in the world, you know. Although she’s super cute that way.”

Listening to his father’s puppy-love remark, Subaru put on an annoyed-look on his face. But seeing this, Kenichi let out an “Ennnnn~”, and then, looking upwards, swiping his nose like a mischievous little boy,

Kenichi: “You know what. The weather is really nice today— Why don’t we go outside for a nice heart-to-heart, between father and son.”

⁵⁶ English flip. Means “scenario” (場面), originally “シチュエーション” (situation).

⁵⁷ English flip. Means “foreshadowing” (伏線), originally “フラグ” (flags).

Arc 4 Chapter 17 - Love Story

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 10, Chapter 4 “Parent and Child”, Parts 3-4

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Parts 2+3](#)

???: “Ooh, Ken-san, sure’s rare seeing you wandering around in the morning. Finally got laid off?”

Kenichi: “Don’t give me that crap, that place’ll grind to halt without me. They just didn’t want me to work too hard and take everyone else’s jobs, so they let me rest a bit to giv’em some motivation.”

Even though the owner of the neighborhood bakery passing on a bicycle was only making a friendly greeting, Kenichi threw a middle finger right back at him, cursing. They continued the rowdy conversation like this for a bit, before finally waving goodbye.

Kenichi: “Geez, whenever he sees someone on holiday that he hasn’t seen in a while, he goes on about «laid-off laid-off». I got a loving family to provide for here, how could I be that incompetent? Even if I did something that’d get me fired, it’s not like I’d let’em catch me, hehehe.”

Subaru: “As someone you’re providing for, I sincerely hope that rather than being good at hiding it, you actually hadn’t done anything that’d get yourself fired for.”

His hands shoved inside the pockets of his jersey, Subaru, who had been waiting at the side of the road for the conversation to finish, shrugged his shoulders. Seeing his son standing in the shade being blown by the wind, Kenichi waved both his hands with “Oyoy”, shaking his head,

Kenichi: “A man who has forgotten the sense of adventure won’t grow, you know? Doing bad things is a different matter, but the view is always best from the edge of the thin line, isn’t it...”

Subaru: “You’re way past the age to be saying stupid things like that, you should’ve settled down by now. You’re already over forty and still talking about those irresponsible things like a little kid.”

Kenichi: “Men are supposed to keep their childish innocence even after they’ve grown up. Besides, you’re the one who’s at an age to say those stupid lines, but you don’t join in the conversations, so dad has no choice but to say them for you. What’s up with that anyway?”

Subaru: “Nothing’s up, I just can’t talk to random old guys I don’t know.”

Kenichi: “He’s not a random old guy, I always buy bread from him on my way home. Also, he was my junior in high school, he was one grade below me.”

But Subaru still wouldn’t know him even if he told him that. He didn’t usually pay attention to the bread packaging, and he never passed by that bakery personally.

As Subaru’s silence gave off the feeling that the conversation was coming to an end, Kenichi smacked his tongue saying “It can’t be helped, I guess”,

Kenichi: “On such a sunny and refreshing morning, that stink face of yours is going to piss off the Great Sun-sama, you know. You look like you’re being interrogated or something.”

Subaru: “If I look like I’m being interrogated, it’d be because my dad pulled me out here by force, wouldn’t it... I said no and you still pulled me out.”

Kenichi: “You just looked like you were resisting, but your body followed along nicely, right? See, you still love your old man, Subaru. Rest assured; I love you too. Second only to your mom, of course!”

Swinging out his strides again, Kenichi, laughing and in a good mood, roughly patted Subaru on the back. The force made Subaru raise his brows, and somehow, he felt like something was different about Kenichi’s high spirits.

Well, his father always had this kind of *tenshon* about him, but usually the hyper-moody Kenichi would probably have fussed for a long time about their conversation just now. He didn’t know why, but this morning his father seemed especially tolerating.

—Unlike Subaru, who was walking alongside him feeling like his chest was about to be crushed.

Subaru: “So, um...”

Kenichi: “Yeah?”

Subaru: “So, you brought me out here because you had something to say, right? Usually you wouldn’t go to so much trouble... So what is it? It’s something you couldn’t say at home, isn’t it?”

Wondering if it was something he didn’t want mom to hear, Subaru asked this.

No matter what it was, Subaru had a vaguely bad feeling about it. Either way, what else could it be except to reproach him for his anemic lifestyle?

When their daily conversations were separated by a layer of futon, he could have ignored them if he wished to, but outside, he couldn’t do this. Although, he could always shout loudly and shut it all out. If he embarrassed himself like this outdoors, perhaps Kenichi would change his attitude, and maybe he’d even stop Subaru’s — No, thinking up to this point, Subaru shook his head.

Subaru: “If it’s my father, he’d probably get a kick out of being shamed...”

Kenichi: “Even though I don’t know what you’re imagining there, what’s with that kinky remark all of a sudden? This is just a nice average everyday family conversation under the sun, you know.”

Subaru: “Really, it’s a bit hard to believe you... But I’ll trust you for now.”

Kenichi: “That’s it that’s it. By the way, Subaru, do you, uh... want a little brother or sister?”

Subaru: “It’s a bit frightening to be asked this question when I’m seventeen years old!!”

The change of topic that flew in slanted made Subaru shudder and raise his voice. Seeing Subaru panting with his shoulders going up and down, Kenichi bared his teeth with a smile “Joking, joking”,

Kenichi: “Although your mom and I are still lovey-dovey, it’d be stretching it a bit to make another person at our age. So that means, all of me and mom’s love are all reserved for you alone. Happy?”

Subaru: “Aah, yeah yeah, happy happy... You really were just joking right?”

Kenichi: “Oyoy, don’t be like that. If you give me that face, I might just get excited after all and go make a new one you know?”

Sensing they’ve come to a point where joking around wouldn’t be enough anymore, Subaru only gazed at him silently at end of that sentence. And, wryly smiling in return, Kenichi received his meaning.

—Subaru and his father had arrived at a scenic path that was about ten minutes away from the house.

They were passing an area where a regionally famous river flowed through. Along the banks, were planted cherry-blossom trees that would become an attraction during the spring. But of course, the season was already over, and instead of pink cherry-blossom petals, it was luscious green grass covering the ground, bathed under the bright rays of the sun.

After breakfast, and before the end of school hours, Subaru, being tormented by the guilt and anxiety of the passage of that time, was brought here by Kenichi. At first, when he left the house, he had been worried that he might be brought all the way to school this way.

Kenichi: “You know you look kinda wary whenever we turn toward the direction of the school. But it’s not what you think, we just took the long way ‘round to the river bank.”

Having read through his thoughts, Kenichi sneakily dragged Subaru here.

A sweet scent of plants and grass blew over the top of the embankments, and if one merely stretched a little, one would be able to see the full view of the gentle river on the other side of the fence.

Kenichi: “This fence didn’t use to be here in the olden days. I used to always play here in the river with buddies of mine, it was great fun. Oh, right, you remember Ikeda? One day a typhoon came, and we wanted to see how great the river had become, and that guy wound up getting carried away by the current... That time, there just happened to be an old uncle who had just got his lifeguard license passing by, Ikeda would’ve been dead if it weren’t for him.”

Subaru: “So this fence, was dad and this Ikeda guy’s fault then?”

Kenichi: “Nah couldn’t have... No, wait a minute? Timing-wise it does seem to kinda strangely match up now that I think about it...”

Leaning against the fence, gazing out toward the river, Kenichi, reminiscing about the by-gone days, tilted his head. Behind his father, Subaru, who seemed bored, only looked around him.

Before noon on a working day, it was only natural that there were not many people around. Or, more accurately, there was no one else except Subaru and Kenichi. It wasn’t an easy place to get to in the

first place. If anyone wandered around here at this time, it could only be the custodian, or someone who really loved this place. Just as he thought this, Subaru heard someone's footsteps on the grass.

???: "Ooooh? I was wonderin' who it is, isn't this Ken-bo? What's this what's this, still playing by the river at this age?"

Kenichi: "Speak of the devil... It's the uncle from the custodian's hut, they still didn't get someone to replace you? You'll be the one surprised though, I wore my beach-trunks today instead of my river-trunks, so I can't get in there even if I want to."

Old Man: "Don't gimme that. I don't see no difference between beach-trunks and river-trunks, that's just a load of crap from the guy who jumped in the river in his underpants. But come to think of it, it's been a long time since I seen ya."

Climbing up the banks, a short, hunching old man greeted Kenichi and shook his hand. He looked kind of like a nice grandpa and was wearing an old green uniform. Judging from the conversation and the logo on his back, he must have been the custodian of the embankments.

In fact, if he knew Kenichi back when he was still playing in the river, he must have been a veteran at that. In their long-awaited reunion, the two of them laughed and chatted, and then, the old man made a clap with his hands,

Old Man: "Oh, right, if you're here, what happened to your friend Ikeda? That guy sure gets carried away often, even my net was wearin' out from catchin' him."

Kenichi: "That bastard Ikeda, won big on a horse-ticket ten years ago, and took his load of money to Thailand and haven't heard a word of him since. Just the New Year's greetings, Summer greetings, Winter greetings, Christmas, Fathers' day and Mothers' day and random letters like that."

Subaru: "That sounds like a lot of correspondence for someone who you haven't heard a word of since..."

Unable to resist the urge, Subaru had to mutter that straight-man observation. Then, hearing the quiet mutter, the old man looked over and raised his brows as if only suddenly noticing Subaru's presence there.

Old Man: "Ooooh, you got a little buddy 'ere... eh? Could this be your..."

Kenichi: “Aaah, that’s right, this is my son. No, I should say my beloved son.”

Old Man: “Ooh, is that so! I got the feeling he looked like you when you wer’ little... No, not too much though. He didn’t take after ya. Took after his mother more... I’m guessin’?”

Kenichi: “Yeah yeah. People often say that. Especially the eyes.”

The most prominent thing on that otherwise plain face was his *sanpaku* eyes. His mother’s eyes were so sharp it felt as though there were steel beams inside, and this part of him, in particular, was certainly his mother’s influence showing through. With that harmless remark, the old man walked up to Subaru,

Old Man: “S’tat right s’tat right, but it sure surprised me there. So Ken-bo already has a son this big, how the time passes quickly. Then again, I’m getting old. Even if Ikeda got himself drowned again, I won’t be able to save him.”

Subaru: “Even for Ikeda, I doubt he’d go play in the river and get himself drowned at this age...”

Old Man: “Sure hope not... They really were brats who wouldn’t sit still though, these two. Especially your father, back then he was causin’ trouble all over the place. So, what bring you wandering around town this time of day anyway?”

Subaru: “...Eeh, well.”

Subaru mumbled this reply. Hearing this, the old man looked as if he had picked something up and frowned. Then, as he furrowed up his deep, wrinkled brows,

Old Man: “Hm? That’s Ken-bo’s son alright... But today’s a Monday isn’t it. Why’re you still at the riverbanks with your dad?”

Subaru: “—Keh!”

Having been asked the question he most wished to avoid, Subaru’s expression stiffened painfully.

Then right after, the same sharp, piercing headache he experienced inside his room came. Involuntarily, in excruciating pain, he hugged his head and squeezed shut his eyes, wrenching out an “Excuse me!”, he turned his back to the old man and ran.

Kenichi: “Ah, oy, hey, Subaru! Sorry, uncle-chan. I’ll explain everything next time I see you.”

Old Man: “Ah, oh-ooh... Maybe I said something I shouldn’t have. Tell your son I’m sorry for me.”

The words that followed behind him did not register in his ears at all.

In any case, Subaru was only trying to escape from the skull-crushing pain in his head, to escape somewhere where his heartbeat would settle, somewhere away from the embankments.

Kenichi: “There’s nothing to apologize to him for— It’s that guy’s own problem anyway.”

He quietly muttered under his breath.

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Kenichi: “Here. Cool delicious cola filled with love. Shaken well for extra deliciousness... That’s what I wanna say, it doesn’t look like it’s the best time for it though.”

Subaru: “...Love-filled scenes don’t come out of vending machines. But thanks.”

Receiving the can, and tasting its coolness within his palms, Subaru brought a finger to the pull-tab. Then, with some consideration, he closed his eyes, pointed the can away from anyone present, and pulled the tab with his finger – and foam and liquid alike came exploding out of the opening with incredible force. Instantly the can in his hand lost a third of its weight.

Kenichi: “Oyoy, what’s with that, fall for it damnit. I even especially said something about shaking it beforehand to give off the impression that I didn’t shake it when in fact I did, for a «two-step deception technique», you know.”

Subaru: “I’ve already seen that pattern before, just how many years have we known each other, dad? Knowing there’s no way you wouldn’t shake it is also a kind of trust in itself. Oh, hands are sticky.”

Shaking off the overflowing cola that was spilling over his hands, Subaru lightly tilted the cola to his lips. The taste of expanding carbon passed through his mouth, splashing and quenching the thirst in the depths

of his throat. If only the sickness deep within his chest could be washed away as well, but unfortunately, the heaviness still remained there.

Kenichi: "So, have you settled down?"

Subaru: "...Hard to say."

Answering the question, Subaru plopped himself down on the bench, and let out a long sigh as he dropped down his shoulders. Standing in front of Subaru, also delivering cola to his lips, Kenichi closed one of his eyes as if he was thinking about something.

After having ran away from the conversation on the embankment, Subaru and his father came to a children's playground not far from the river. Of course, there was no one here either, nor were there any fathers who suddenly got plunged into long summer vacations languishing on the swings or anything like that.

Kenichi: "In a way, I feel like even if I ride on the swings now I wouldn't be able to laugh like I used to. What would you do, Subaru? If dad took a ride on the swings on the way back from the convenience store."

Subaru: "I'd take a photo on my phone and spread it around on Twitter. The Tweet would be «My father has been released from gravity»."

Kenichi: "Oooh, Twitter. Dad's on Twitter too you know. I followed and got followed by too many people though, the screen's all a mess now."

Hearing him say this happily, Subaru sent Kenichi a side glance, before spilling out a languorous sigh as he searched for a topic. Anything, as long as it was something other than what happened on the riverbank — If he went through that again, his skull would scream.

The shorter and shorter intervals in between the headaches worried him, but just like the way he'd react to his weakness, he could only repress and ignore the feeling as obstinately as he could.

Subaru: "...It was just buying drinks from a vending machine, what took you so long?"

Kenichi: “Oh? Nothing really. There was just this high-school girl who skipped school hanging out in front of the vending machine. I gave her a lecture about getting back to school, bought her a drink, swapped email addresses, and sent her off.”

Subaru: “I seriously can’t believe how you can get a girl’s email address that fast.”

Getting a high-school girl’s email as casually as going to the bathroom and back, he really had no words to describe that ability. Seeing Subaru like this, Kenichi tilted his head, “Really?”

Kenichi: “Email addresses, they just hand them right over don’t they? The number of high school girls in my contacts list must be in the three digits already.”

Subaru: “Even if I add all my contacts together I don’t know if it’ll be in the double digits, and you have three digits just from high-school girls, do we have different definitions for the word «digits» here or something... And dad, you didn’t do anything inappropriate to any of the high school girls that we’d end up seeing you on the news for, right?”

Kenichi: “What’re you talking about, you.”

Kenichi held up both hands at Subaru’s suspicion, and shrugged up his shoulders to demonstrate his astonishment.

Kenichi: “It’s not like I’d get any ideas about little brats like high-school girls. The target of my love has already been determined a long time ago, my sensual passions are reserved for my family alone!”

Subaru: “If you categorize it like that, I’d be a target too!”

Kenichi: “...Well, ’cause I love ya. We only get to live *ippen*⁵⁸, no?”

Subaru: “God no! What are you even saying!!”

Kenichi laughs at Subaru's flipping out.

⁵⁸ Engrish flip. Means “once/one time” (一遍), originally “ワンチャン” (one chance).

Although the way he laughs was vulgar and hard on the ears, it did not give off a bad feeling. In fact, the same goes for anything Kenichi does. His behaviors were unconventional, over-the-top, over-dramatic, the kind that makes people want to cringe, but everyone receives them favorably for some reason.

Today, walking with his father for the first time in a while, Subaru got a real sense of this.

Just walking along the street, there had been more people stopping to chat with Kenichi than could be counted on a single hand. No matter where he went, there was someone to share old reminiscences with, and even if he had only just met the other person for the very first time, they would soon get along thick-as-thieves, thanks to his easy-going air. And he didn't hide any of it, either.

Throbbing, the pain returned to his temples, and Subaru's breathing grew ragged with every breath. The intervals in between the scathing aches were no longer shrinking, instead, it was now arriving in fits. As if the inside of his skull was being jabbed by needles, it was no longer something that could be cured by leaving it alone. But it was not like the hospital would know what to do with it either.

Even if he didn't understand the reasons for his pain, he knew its cause.

What else could it be, except the emotions weighing upon his chest, and the choking, suffocating sensation accompanying it.

Kenichi: "You look ill, Subaru. Want me to piggyback you back to the house?"

Subaru: "I don't need to be piggybacked, or to go home... It'd be the same even if I go back."

Rather, if he saw his mother Naoko at home, Subaru's condition would only grow worse.

He was beginning to understand what that pain was, and what was making it worse. If what he imagined was correct, then when he does return Kenichi and Naoko again, the pain will rise to its extremes. In other words,

Subaru: "Finally, even my own body is giving me a lecture."

Endlessly running away from his guilt, perhaps his body was finally screaming back at him.

The terror of the time spent holding his knees inside his room, staring at the second-hand of the clock. The unrelenting anxiety and the acute, rending aches that lingered even after the threshold had passed.

The sickening malaise, like someone raving loudly in the interior of his skull, screaming accusations at what Subaru had become.

—Who and where did you come from, and what do you know about me, anyway.

Kenichi: “So, um, Subaru— Is there, a girl that you like?”

The silent Subaru was suddenly tossed this topic out of the blue. It was the same question he had been asked in his room, the beginning of that same, unfunny joke. The first time, he had smiled wryly and refuted it, but now, this second time, somehow it was getting on his nerves.

His annoyance boosted by the merciless ache in his head, he tried to return the same answer when—

???: “—*Subaru.*”

Suddenly, from somewhere, he thought he heard a voice like a silver chime, sending his heart astir.

Subaru: “—?”

Lifting his face, he searched for the source of the whisper. But even so, his eyes could not find the owner of the voice, and the only other person in the park besides Subaru, was Kenichi, standing in front of him. Kenichi, seeing Subaru’s sudden movement, also raised his brows in surprise,

Kenichi: “What is it? You look like you just heard a beautiful girl who’s not there suddenly call your name.”

Subaru: “Even if that’s the case, I don’t really have an answer to that... Just now, did anyone call my name? Dad, you didn’t learn to make your voice sound like beautiful girls while I wasn’t looking, did you?”

Kenichi: “Your dad knows all kinds of little tricks, but not that one. Ok, I’ll start practicing it and show it off next time, I’ll let you hear it in a month or so.”

Subaru: “I’m not asking you to learn that... Geez, what’s with you...”

Putting a stop to his father's words, Subaru looked away, and played back that voice he heard over-and-over again in his mind. The voice like a silver chime was gentle, yet its sound made Subaru heat up as it struck him, and in that instant, he was allowed to forget about the throbbing pain in his head.

From a place he did not know, came that voice of salvation — Like the melodious song of a goddess, it tended to Subaru's suffering, and calmed his expression a little, his breathing grew slightly more even.

Kenichi: "So, uh, my question from before. Is there, a girl you like?"

Subaru: "...What's gotten into you lately. What would you do with the answer, anyway? Even if there is one and I tell you her name it's not like you'd know her."

Kenichi: "You never know, right? There's a chance I have the email address of the girl you like in my cell phone you know?"

Subaru: "If the girl I have a crush on gave her email address to my dad, even a love of a hundred years will grow cold."

Being tossed with that statement, Kenichi pouted up his lips with a "What's that supposed to mean". Watching the gesture that really didn't suit a middle-aged man, Subaru drank up the last of his cola,

Subaru: "You don't have to be so indirect about it, you know. Why not just ask me directly... Like, why don't I go to school."

Kenichi: "Well here I am trying to be considerate for once, you really are a kid who can't read the mood."

Smiling wryly at Subaru's words, Kenichi continued with "Well",

Kenichi: "I did want to ask that, so you're not wrong about that."

Subaru: "I was thinking too... I shouldn't be like this."

Kenichi: "Thinking isn't always necessary. The things that we think of are only empty ideas, and one way or another, there will always be something we couldn't think of, something we overlooked."

Seeing Subaru averting his eyes and making that quiet excuse, Kenichi drank up his cola as well, and sat down beside him. The wooden bench creaked, and a gust of wind flew past between them. And so, they both looked on toward the same direction, neither seeing each other's faces.

Kenichi: "I don't really know what everyone else in the world believes, but I don't think school is everything. Mostly, because I'm saying that as someone who didn't really go to school seriously in the first place. I even skipped my own high school graduation ceremony you know, my sister had to bring me my graduation certificate back for me afterwards."

Subaru: "I heard that story so many times. Auntie who's two years younger than dad went to the same school, so when she graduated, they just gave dad's certificate to her as well. There're octopuses growing in my ears already⁵⁹."

Kenichi: "Well you'll keep hearing it until you get cuttlefish. So, since I was like that, I think it's alright if you don't go to school if you don't want to. But, at my age, I do feel like I lost out on something by not going to school seriously, although it's not something you could understand yet."

Kenichi looked like he was staring into some far-off place as he said this. Stealing a glance at the side of his serious expression, Subaru got the feeling that his father was really unfair, after all.

Usually only showing the side of him pretending to be an idiot, and then in a place like this, he suddenly makes you wonder where all that clowning had gone.

Kenichi: "It's alright though... isn't it? Nowadays people can live to about eighty years old on average. Out of eighty years, wasting one or two slacking around isn't that big of a deal. Getting back on track while you're young is easy too. Good thing my salary's still intact."

Circling his finger around, Kenichi made a dirty-looking smile. Without looking at Subaru, who had not made a sound since he had begun, he crossed his arms and nodded his head,

Kenichi: "Being alive means that occasionally you'll get problems that you couldn't find the answers to. When I get problems like that, I'd run around like a headless chicken looking for a solution, but it's also

⁵⁹ The word "octopus" is an homonym of "callus" in Japanese (たこ). The original expression is "耳にたこができる", meaning "you've told me that again and again" (see [here](#)).

possible to find answers by rolling around in a room, I guess. I won't blame you while you're still contemplating. But if you're beginning to give up, then I'll say a thing or two."

Subaru: "...Why?"

Kenichi: "Hm?"

Subaru: "Why, did you suddenly feel like telling me all this today... There's nothing different, it's not a special day or anything. Today's just, a memorial day for green peas..."

Kenichi: "There was a lot on that plate... Huh."

In insides of his mouth that had just recently drank cola was quickly drying up.

Taking gasping breaths, Subaru anxiously waited for the answer to his question. Noticing Subaru's fretfulness from the side, Kenichi gave his neck a stretch with "Hmmm-",

Kenichi: "I wonder why. Maybe it was because I happened to have a day off, or because I inadvertently thought of it while doing my morning dry-towel rub-down, or because the horoscopes for Aquarius this morning said «You'll be in perfect form», or because the look on your face this morning seemed... it's just a lil' bit, but it seemed like it had become better somehow."

Subaru: "My face, got better?"

Kenichi: "I'm talking about the look here. The face's still the same, it's still that scary face with your mom's eyes and all."

Kenichi made a scary face by pulling up the corners of his eyes with his fingers, and then, saying "Not only that", he pointed the same fingers at Subaru,

Kenichi: "I don't know what happened, but you don't look like a guy who's been holed up in a room. Judging from what your mom said, you didn't go out yesterday either, so you should've been a guy who's been holed up in a room, right?"

Subaru: "...Uh, I guess so. I've also been surfing in the grand ocean of the internet, though."

Kenichi: “If people can grow up that way, the number of lost-lamb-girl-chans coming to confide in me on Twitter should be decreasing instead of increasing...”

Subaru: “So you’ve even been doing that kind of...”

While astonished by the extent of his father’s dealings, Subaru didn’t want to let Kenichi get away from the main subject. On the other hand, Subaru really had no idea what Kenichi meant by that.

The truth is, just as his mother provided in her testimony, yesterday’s Subaru, same as the Subaru’s even earlier before that, only wasted his time in slothful indulgence.

In only the span of a single day, to say that all of a sudden today, the atmosphere about him changed...

Subaru: “Dad, you must have gotten it wrong, or you just didn’t properly look at me before.”

Kenichi: “That last part really stung! You know I’m still using that *kawaii-gaki-egao*⁶⁰ picture of you when you were little as my cell phone screensaver right?”

Subaru: “The lovely part aside, the devil part makes me realize how scary-looking my eyes must have been even when I was little.”

Either way, there was no doubt that Kenichi got it wrong. Yesterday was still yesterday, today was still today. Subaru still spent his time without changing anything at all.

It would be alright to be like this, he thought, and he intended it to be this way. If he just continued on like this, surely, one day, Kenichi and Naoko would realize it as well.

—What Subaru really wanted, that is.

Subaru: “—Dddagh!”

The moment he thought this, pain struck him again like fiery sparks scattering in front of his eyes.

⁶⁰ Engrish flip. Means “cute little devil smile” (可愛いがき笑顔), originally “ラブリーデビルな笑顔” (lovely-devil smile).

A shock as if someone actually punched him, like his brain was protruding out of his skull, his cranium creaked and his eyes spun, and Subaru's seated body crumbled.

The pounding of his heart once again sped up like an alarm bell, and he could hear the sound of his pulse from the blood throbbing through in his ears. His eyes grew murky, the world turned into two, then three. The sense of nausea surged up, and deep in his chest an incomprehensible heat source asserted its presence.

Each in their own ways they tormented his very existence, like seething accusations they shrieked and wailed.

Kenichi: "Oyoy, it looks really serious this time. Are you alright, Subaru?"

Unable to ignore the terrible condition he was in, Kenichi placed his hand on Subaru's shoulder with a worried look on his face. Sensing that touch, Subaru finally lifted his face, as sweat was emerging on his forehead,

Subaru: "Aah... No, it's alright. I was just a little, dizzy, that's all..."

???: "*—It's been rough, hasn't it?*"

Subaru: "—!?"

Once again, every hair of Subaru's body stood on end as the voice like the sound of silver chimes rang upon his earlobes.

Kind and tender, the voice was filled with affection and concern. His tensed heart melted at the sound, and as it tended to his suffering, the pain, the creaking, the heat and their chorus of screams subsided.

What was this voice. Why was the pain and agony retreating from it. It felt, like a voice he knew. Like one he had been longing for. Yearning and yearning, pursuing and pursuing, clinging onto it, losing it, then regaining it once more—

???: "*Thank you, Subaru.*"

Subaru: "You're..."

The sight of her silver hair dancing in the wind branded itself into the back of his eyelids. The light of her amethyst eyes stared straight into Subaru's face, and every sound weaved from her lips filled him with love and longing.

???: *"For helping me."*

What's going on, what's going on, what's going on, what's going on, what's going on?

Who is it, who is it, who is it, who is it, who is it, who is it, who is it, who is it, who is it?

—Could she be the cause of his agony? His pain, torment, feelings so bitter that he wanted to puke, could they all be because of her?

???: *"—Subaru."*

He couldn't breathe. His throat is hot. Something was building up in the back of his eyes.

???: *"It can't be helped, so."*

The tips of his fingers trembled. There was no strength left in his legs. His throat cramped up as though his lungs were convulsing.

???: *"Subaru always tries to cover it up like that."*

Covering his face with his trembling hands, holding back the sobs from his clogged-up throat, surging heat spilling from his eyes, Subaru—

???: *"Why, did you help me?"*

—The answer was already in his heart.

The moment he saw it, all the unease swirling inside him vanished. The creaking of his skull, the rising nausea, the dizziness turning the world vague, the frantic pounding of his heart, all came to a stop as if clearing the path for Natsuki Subaru.

Lifting his face, he wiped away the tears that were about to fall. Staring fixedly at his wetted sleeves, the only trace that remained of his tears, as if flinging it aside, he turned his wrist and held his hand tight into a fist. And,

Subaru: “Sorry I made you worry. I’m alright now.”

Kenichi: “Really? Well it’s good you calmed down, don’t keep making people worry, geez.”

Subaru: “Yeah, my bad. So, um, about the question you asked earlier.”

Releasing his father’s hand on his shoulder, Subaru turned to face him.

Sitting side-by-side on the bench, Subaru looked straight into his father’s face. Come to think of it, after all their conversations today, this was the first time he truly looked at his father’s face, he thought. Running away even in place like this, he couldn’t help but smile wryly at his own weakness inside his heart. Then, turning to his father, who now had a question mark above his head, Subaru,

Subaru: “—There is, someone I like. So, I’m already alright now.”

Sketching out the face that was burned into the back of his eyelids, Natsuki Subaru’s resolve to face his past was sealed.

Arc 4 Chapter 18 - Parent and Child

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 10, Chapter 4 “Parent and Child”, Parts 5-6

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Parts 3+4](#)

—He felt his head clearing up.

The chorus of agony that had had been ripping him apart until now subsided, and currently, there was only one thing on Subaru’s mind — The resolve to face his father in front of him.

Subaru: “I do. Have someone I like.”

Once more, he repeated his answer to that question.

Putting it to his lips again, Subaru felt his heart beginning to walk forward.

In front of his eyes, hearing that confession, Kenichi blinked several times before noticing how abrupt that statement sounded,

Kenichi: “...Is that so.”

Speaking in a quiet voice, he listened to Subaru’s words.

That attitude was like a salvation. There were people who were willing to listen, Subaru must have already known this, yet he had only ever kept it to himself.

Now, he intended to bring an end to it.

—Because there is someone behind me, pushing me on.

Subaru: “That’s right. I am not the child who only curls up in a room anymore.”

He didn't know exactly how much he had changed. The "no longer a child" part might be stretching it a bit, for he was still aware of how childish he was.

The courage to hold his head high, the resolve to face his weakness, the determination to no longer run from unpleasant situations, it seemed he hadn't acquired any of it, after all.

He was simply someone who was worse than a child, who was finally admitting he was a child.

And even that, he couldn't have realized by himself.

The silver visage that appeared within his mind, sent a sweetness into Subaru's heart. It was a radiance that brought warmth to the stagnating Subaru, who had long been frozen in place.

Silver — it was supposed to be a color of coldness, but to Subaru now, it was a source of endless warmth and the strength to march forward. As though mesmerized by this heat,

Subaru: "What was I so afraid of, that I had to curl up like a ball, I remember all of it now— No, I already knew long ago. I knew, but I pretended not to see it... The weakness that I thought only I would notice, while I pretended not to see them, there were those who..."

...Who he couldn't fool. He knew who those people were.

Subaru: "Mom, and dad, I wished you would've beaten me."

Kenichi: "———"

Subaru: "I was such a hopeless, little, useless idiot, self-conceited piece of trash, I wished you two would just beat me... and give up on me."

Silently staring at Subaru, Kenichi's eyes did not move.

Subaru saw his own reflection inside those pupils that were the same color as his own. The sharp corners of his own eyes that were often mistaken for a sign of displeasure, for some reason, were now feeble, and drooping.

—How pathetic, he thought.

Subaru: “When I was little, I was clever, and I could find a perfect solution to anything. Running too, and same with studying... The things my friends around me couldn’t do, I could figure out almost immediately, and I was even mystified by why everyone else had so much trouble.”

Perhaps it was childish conceit, or one could call it an adorable sense of omnipotence.

When Subaru was little, his athletics and learning were all ahead of other children his age. He could run faster than those around him, he was smarter than those the same age as him, and as if it were only natural, he was at the center of everything—

???: *“He’s that guy’s child, after all.”*

Everyone gave Subaru this appraisal, adults and neighbors alike often kept it on their tongues.

He knew, by “that guy”, they meant his father, and the fact that he was his father’s son was recognized by people all around — And the young Subaru took pride in those words.

Dad — Subaru’s father, Natsuki Kenichi, was a person full of charisma and allure in his son’s eyes.

He laughed well, talked well, cried well, angered well, exercised well, worked well.

His father could announce his love for Subaru and his mother in public without feeling the slightest embarrassment, his father was surrounded by people who admired him no matter where he was, and he always saw his father standing in the center of a crowd of smiling faces.

To Subaru, such a father was more than anything he could have hoped for, to have such a father who cherished his family, Subaru and his mother, above all the world, instilled him with a sense of superiority to the point of exuberant pride.

—I want to become like father. I want to become like father.

For the young Subaru, the expanse of his father’s back was the expanse of the world itself, and the world was only something to be seen from on top of his father’s back.

And so every day, Subaru spent in happiness, and in search of happiness. But,

Subaru: “I wonder when it started... I don’t remember, but one day I lost a race, I think. Soon, I was no longer the first at everything. There were now guys who could run faster than me, guys who can solve problems faster than I can. Little by little, my first-places grew fewer and fewer, and it felt strange, I thought.”

Once it had started it only grew worse, and the shining stars within Subaru’s heart gradually left him.

Even if he stretched out his hand, running here and there under the sky, the stars that once shined all around him were nowhere to be found. There was only the silence of the coming, enshrouding darkness.

And in that elusive, uncertain anxiety,

???: *“He’s that guy’s child, after all.”*

Those words became Subaru’s salvation, the last hope he could hold onto.

Even if he was not the fastest or the smartest, those words continued holding up the young Subaru’s confidence.

Rather than training to run faster, or devoting all his efforts to his schoolwork, he decided first and foremost to do stupid things.

Sneaking into school at night with his friends, drawing over the white lines all over town, chasing away notoriously dangerous stray dogs from their hangout spots — All so people would not grow tired of him, so he could protect the last of his dwindling stars.

Subaru: “Studying hard is stupid. Being able to run fast is nothing to be proud of. The things I was doing were making people happy, and that’s far more, far better than what anyone else could do.”

In order to sustain this mistaken pride, he had no choice but to keep going.

He will take the lead to do what others are afraid to do, challenge what others loathe to challenge, this way, he would make sure he did not lose his carefully protected place in the world.

Subaru: “But, if I were to protect myself this way, the next time I’d have no choice but to do something even bigger. It can’t be less than what I had done before. They’d think I was someone small if I did, and I couldn’t let that happen.”

So Subaru's actions could only become more and more extreme. If anyone asked why he would do such things, "He's Natsuki Subaru" would be the answer.

—Yes, it could only be Natsuki Subaru.

Natsuki Subaru was braver than anyone else, wilder than anyone else, freer than anyone else, so he must continue to be the existence that everyone else longed to be.

Straining himself, stretching himself thin, he tried to hide his nervousness, so that not even he himself would have noticed it, he continued fooling himself and those around him that he could do much, much more.

Because he was Natsuki Kenichi's son, Natsuki Subaru.

Subaru: "I thought I could do anything. I made myself believe that I would do anything. And without ever bothering to think beforehand, everything I did, and every consequence of what I did became a stupid mess..."

Like a moth circling toward a flame, he single-mindedly pursued the heat without even noticing that he had caught fire.

If he really were a moth, becoming enchanted by a flame would have been the end of him. But Subaru was not a moth, nor were the friends who surrounded him. They were only human, even more so than Subaru.

—It appeared nothing in particular had set it off.

Attracted by the mischief Subaru proclaimed, similarly scary-faced kids came gathering around him.

And like teeth breaking off of a comb, the number of companions around him began to drop.

Subaru: "A bunch of idiots, I thought. You won't find this kind of fun anywhere except sticking by my side. Those guys will regret it, but they're free to waste their boring time elsewhere. My sights are on something higher."

If he continued searching like this for the whereabouts of those stars, at least he won't lose sight of the star above his head.

Of the sea of stars that once should have painted all the sky, now, only one lone, sparkling star remained to Subaru, and so he walked on and on without letting it out of his sight—

—Until suddenly, when he turned his eyes from the star-lit sky back to the ground,

Subaru: “There was already no one else around me.”

Of course this happened.

Without minding his surroundings, continually chasing after stars that no one else could see.

His companions, who at first found it amusing, seeing the ever-escalating wildness with no landing point in sight, could no longer follow him.

Paying no mind to this, only mocking at those who left as idiots, even those who remained grew uneasy and doubtful.

One, and then another, his friends disappeared from his side, until he noticed he was all alone under the starlit sky.

Feeling angry, sulking, wanting to forget, he gazed up at the sky—

Subaru: “Even the radiant star that should have been above me is nowhere to be found anymore.”

When he lost sight of the light of that star, deserted by the friends around him, left alone in the dark of night, Subaru finally noticed it.

—I was never anyone special.

???: “*He’s that guy’s child, after all.*”

They were the magical words which the young Subaru once embraced with pride, and once would have injected Subaru’s heart full of vitality.

Since when, he did not know, they had turned into a curse.

Subaru: “Just going outside, wandering around town, it’ll be obvious. No matter where I go, where I look, I’d find lingering traces dad left behind... It’s only natural, I guess.”

Subaru's small and narrow world was precisely the same as the view from on top of his father's back.

To Subaru, who aspired to reach the same heights as his father, no matter where he is, no matter where he looked in that narrow world, there was not a single place where he could not sense his father's lingering scents.

Gradually, for Subaru, the world turned into a terrifying place.

At the same time, eating away at Subaru's heart, was the painful self-awareness that he was only ordinary, and the sense of shame that made him want to hide that ordinariness from his parents and anyone who knew them.

Loved by everyone, relied upon by everyone, smiled at by everyone.

Yet that same Natsuki Kenichi's son, Natsuki Subaru, was shriveling up squeamishly under everyone's gazes, a sickly coward hugging his own head frightened by the vastness of the world, he could not bear to be thought of this way.

His own shortcomings must be nothing less than a humiliation for his father who proclaimed to love him, and perhaps, at some point, even that towering father would grow disappointed in him. That, above all, was what terrified Subaru the most.

In elementary and in middle school, Subaru single-mindedly made an effort to avoid drawing any attention to himself.

The classmates who had known him since the lower grades couldn't wrap their heads around how docile Subaru had become — The children, at their impressionable age, failed to notice even a fragment of the darkness residing in their classmate's heart, and as they each went about their lively days, they soon forgot about such trivial things.

Meanwhile, as he spent this time burying himself in anonymity, as he worked to cast off the shadows of his past, at home, Subaru skillfully continued to play the part of the unruly child.

At school almost as meek as a weed in the shade, as soon as he was home, he would return to the wildness of his youth like he was a completely different person.

Coming home from school, with various accounts of his feats of heroism, he would soften the corners of his mother's lips in midst of her housework and put a smile on his father's face when he returned exhausted from his work.

—All of these, had his parent noticed that they were lies? Even now, Subaru couldn't be certain.

This way, throughout elementary and middle school, he spent the greater part of his life on painting and fortifying these lies and constructing the fictional character of Natsuki Subaru.

Everyone had forgotten the various mischiefs of Subaru's past, and knew him merely as an inconspicuous classmate whom they barely knew anything about beyond his name.

On top of the tinge of loneliness that accompanied this barren relationship with his peers, covering over Subaru's heart was an even more intimate sense of dread. For to bear the surname, Natsuki, was to be constantly in awe of a certain force.

Subaru: "Now that I think about it, it really was a dark way to live. But doing this, I passed through elementary and middle school. Then putting that behind me, I became a high school student... Even though it's a local school, probably because of the standard deviation-adjusted score, almost none of my classmates got into the same one..."

Having gotten into the habit of thinking only of retreating, with the sudden, drastic change of environment, Subaru seized his opportunity to move forward and assembled together every fragment of courage that still remained in him.

Wrenching out the last bit of that courage, Subaru clenched his teeth and held up his head.

Advancing into the brand-new environment of high school.

Building unknown relationships with unfamiliar faces.

There, even if they judged him as Natsuki Subaru, no one would see him as Natsuki Kenichi's son. In fact, in that place — He might even see the light of that starry sky he had lost, once more.

But the way he used that courage, decisively threw Subaru stumbling off that path.

Subaru: “Even I have to admit, that was one magnificent failure of a high school debut. But, of course it was. You have a guy who hadn’t built any interpersonal relationships all throughout elementary and middle school, thrown into a place full of faces he doesn’t know, breathing roughly through his nose unable to shake off his tension... Even an idiot could see how that’d turn out.”

Unable to see something even an idiot could see, thinking about it now, Subaru realized he must have been even worse than an idiot.

Without going into too much detail, the result was already easy to imagine.

In terms of building interpersonal relationships, Subaru had no other role model except his father, so when the time came to build new relationships in an entirely new environment, his only frame of reference was his father.

—But the kind of jokes that might get him a smile or two while they were still children, when used on classmates in the middle of the psychological changes of the latter stages of puberty, became nothing short of toxic.

Subaru: “Poisonously toxic. Deadly toxic. I was like the kind of poisonous mushrooms with the little red and white dots on it, the ones that have «Highly toxic, you’ll die horribly if you eat it» written all over it-kind of guy.”

How is a guy like that supposed to fit in anywhere?

Setting out into a brand-new environment, Subaru lost his footing on the very first step and fell straight to the bottom of the pit. Then, spending his time alone, becoming firmly established as that awkward, socially dense guy who can’t read the mood, he suddenly thought one morning,

—Ah, I don’t want to go to school today.

Subaru: “I remember that morning. Both mom and dad were out of the house. It felt like too much of a bother to get out of bed, so I slept way past the time when I should have gotten up... And when I finally rushed myself out of bed, panicking, it was already noon, but when I was about get up and change.”

Subaru noticed his heart, and his body, were awfully calm.

At school, while sitting alone in a seat by the window, pretending to be asleep, silently letting the time drift by, Subaru's heart had always been tormented by anxiety and fear.

Not wanting to be in this place, from the moment he set foot in school he would start thinking about going back home. No, even from the moment he woke up, he would start spending his time thinking about when he'd finally return from school.

It was not that he was bullied. It was not that he was being shunned.

Only, Subaru himself had constructed a wall. He was afraid of embracing the hope of touching another's kindness. And the thought of perhaps seeing the light of those stars again, filled him with unease.

If only he could pass a day without having to endure the agony of those hours. That sense of liberation, that sense of relief, drawn by the allure of that sense of powerlessness, little-by-little, Subaru's steps drifted further and further away from school.

Subaru: "Skipping once a week became once every three days, then it's just every other day... Until I stopped going altogether, even two months in a row."

There is no need to talk about the days that came after that.

No longer going to school, Subaru's heart was filled with a sense of relief. It was a sense of liberation at being far away from the school where he had been forced to spend those agonizing hours, and, above all, now ruling over Subaru's heart was a kind of acceptance, and surrender.

For no great reason, he had become the conceited, self-satisfied drop-out, Subaru.

Looking at this Subaru, no one would be thinking "He's that guy's child, after all" anymore, and above all — How disappointed his parents must be to see such a pathetic Subaru. Surely, then, even mom and dad would give up on loving that Subaru.

If a son they had no love for was being considered trash, it probably wouldn't mean anything to them.

But if a son they loved was being labeled as worthless, those two would surely feel angry. And saddened, too. If people saw them like that, they would pity them, even look down on them.

It would be better if Subaru had simply faded out of their lives.

Therefore, Natsuki Subaru—

Subaru: “«I don’t love you, I disown you, You are not... my son». I wished, you’d just say that to me, and throw me away. I wished, you’d give up on me.”

Half-expecting to see the stars that could no longer exist, faintly hoping, he gazed up at the sky.

The effeminate, pathetic Subaru, the stupid creature that did not deserve to be Natsuki Kenichi’s son, only wished to be set free.

—Even Subaru himself had not realized that this was the true content of his heart.

Facing his heart, exposing its interiors, for the first time, Subaru saw the ugliness of his own heart. The thought of himself, stupid and weak, unwilling to admit his faults and averting his eyes, then trying to push it all onto someone else to clean up his mess, it made him want to vomit.

Yet, in the end, the reason Subaru did not abandon himself, was because he was lent a hand by someone who would not abandon him.

???: *“Rem, loves Subaru-kun.”*

Overlapping with the silver outlines in the back of his eyelids, was now an ethereal pale-blue radiance.

Like a soothing wind it blew into Subaru’s heart, sending a consoling warmth through Subaru’s frozen limbs.

Rem: “Let us start from here. From square one... no, from zero!”

When Subaru was supposed to have come to an end, the girl, saying this, gave his back a push.

When Subaru could no longer go on, she lifted his face, took his hand, wrapped her arm around his back, and gave his forehead a kiss, and bestowed him with courage.

Charmed forth by the silver radiance granting him heat and pushed from behind him by the sky-blue warmth prompting him to walk forward, Natsuki Subaru, whose story was supposed to have come to an end, once again started off from zero.

Because he realized this, because he remembered this, because he had decided to march forth from zero — Before zero, he must now resolve the minus, the negatives of his past.

As Subaru's long monologue came to an end, Kenichi, listening, closed his eyes as if lost in thought and fell completely silent. Seeing his father like this, Subaru tried desperately to seal in the weakness and cowardice from leaking from his throat.

Having been granted a chance to reflect, through that small change in his mental state, however little it may have been, he saw the grotesqueness of his own heart. Whether it was now, or before, Subaru had always pushed the consequences of his actions onto others to clean up.

Because he lacked the courage to give up on himself, and because he wanted to be the tragic hero rather than the villain of his own world, without saying a word, he had silently waited for someone else to volunteer to be the villain.

He thought that if he stopped going to school, if he passed his days in slothfulness inside his room, if he continued on being his foolish self — One day Kenichi will kick down the door, and put an end to Subaru's world.

Unconsciously, in the deepest depth of his heart, he looked forward to such an ending to his slothful days.

It was while his mind was trapped in this deadlock, that he came to this parallel world. Then even there, Subaru continued to exhibit his complacency, until—

Kenichi: “—Subaru.”

Kenichi, who had been deep in thought, opened his eyes, and called to Subaru's name.

The sound of that call pulled Subaru's consciousness back from the sea of contemplation and tossed it back into the reality before him — His father's face, directly in front of his eyes, and,

Kenichi: “*Otousan-zutsuki*⁶¹!”

⁶¹ English flip. Means “papa headbutt” (お父さん頭突き), originally “ファーザーヘッド” (father head).

Subaru: “Adaghh!?”

His forehead struck by a terrible impact, Subaru yelped as sparks flew scattering all over. Holding his forehead under the devastating pain, he found Kenichi standing in front of the bench, looking down at him.

Kenichi: “See, Subaru. That was my love-filled *otousan-zutsuki*, a single-blow of fury.”

Subaru: “You called a headbutt and then switched to an axe-kick! You even put your face up close for a masterful feint!!”

Kenichi: “That trick only worked ‘cause you were seated and I was standing! Tch, my body’s grown stiffer. Nothing like what it used to be. That’s what I get for slacking on my after-shower stretches.”

With a weird look on his face, Kenichi started doing some stretching routines. Watching his father while giving the part of his head that took the impact a rub, half-crying from the pain, Subaru wasn’t sure what to do with this completely unexpected reaction. Whatever Subaru did expect, at least it wasn’t this,

Kenichi: “But, Subaru. You know, you... You really are a blockhead.”

Subaru: “Uuooghhh.”

That blunt, precise remark cracked him in two, and Subaru couldn’t help but make a gurgling sound with his throat.

Looking down at Subaru, Kenichi crossed his arms with a snort,

Kenichi: “Going all «uwa-uwa-uwa-uwa» and worrying about everything... Which part of me and mom did you get that kind of self-pity from? You’re totally taking after your mom’s younger brother, you know. The short, fat bald one with that face that looks like he’s always worried about something.”

Subaru: “Well that’s just going too far... Although yes, that uncle was definitely the reason I made it my life goal not to end up fat and bald when I grow up.”

The father and son at least agreed on unreservedly burning that uncle who had absolutely nothing to do with this.

While somewhere far away, under the same sky, their unsuspecting relation was given this scathing review, Kenichi continued with an aggravated look “To begin with”,

Kenichi: “There were all sorts of things that pissed me off, but there was one thing most of all. It just pisses me off that you thought by taking that passive attitude you can get me to stop loving you. With that shut-in-drop-out-apathy-syndrome, you think your own father is just going to go berserk and rip you a new one... What are you, stupid? You want me to scold you? Are you a little girl who didn’t get enough physical intimacy when you were little? Wasn’t all that wrestling I do with you every morning enough?”

Subaru: “The way you said that was misleading in a few places but the gist of it was right so I can’t really refute it...”

Kenichi: “No, if you want me to give up on you, you’ll have to do a lot better than that. Who’s going to give up on a child who’s shutting himself up in a cask? If you want me to hate you, you better go murder half of humanity or something. Then I’ll hate ya.”

Subaru: “We don’t even see that kind of villain in *shounen* manga anymore! Who’s gonna go and do something that absurd!?”

Kenichi: “—Well what you said to me was just as absurd wasn’t it.”

Hearing him say this out loud, Subaru was at a loss for words.

In front of him, Kenichi bent down his waist and met Subaru’s eyes, “We clear?” he asked,

Kenichi: “Even if you are slow as a snail, too dumb to remember the multiplication tables, or go bragging on self-harm blogs to get attention...”

Subaru: “I’m not that slow or dumb or stupid...”

Kenichi: “Even if you are that slow and dumb and stupid, I’m not going to hate you or give up on you. Isn’t that obvious? I am your dad, and you are my son.”

With an exasperated sigh at the end of those words, Kenichi straightened up his back. Subaru looked up, at his father standing tall. Bathed in his son’s gaze, Kenichi said,

Kenichi: “Still, just what kind of superman did you take me for. From what you said, it’s as if I’m some *choukouno-transcendent-technology-kanpekina-flawless-koudogijutsuno-superhero*⁶², you know.”

Subaru: “That’s interpreting it too much.”

Kenichi: “You just don’t know it, but I have all kinds of troubles, regrets, and failures too, I also cry and shout and get rejected... Yeah, I’m nothing special at all. At least I got a nice-looking face, though. Not like you.”

Subaru: “Overconfidence strike-two.”

Kenichi: “When I was your age, I wasn’t all that mature either. Sure, I got a little famous, but it was nothing particularly special. I could stop time a little, kinda, but that was it.”

Subaru: “Should’ve used that when you got hit by a car last year.”

Three-part joke⁶³.

Having exchanged the three straight man rallies perfectly, Kenichi held out his palm for a high-five. But, just as their palms came into contact, one hand grabbed the other,

Kenichi: “Now let me twist the wrist of that dumbass blockhead pain-in-the-ass son of mine to straighten out his character a bit...”

Subaru: “Ow! Owow! Wa-wait, my wrist is gonna... Owwwwhurts!”

Kenichi: “—But I kinda get the feeling that won’t be necessary, you already look pretty beaten-up as it is.”

His twisted wrist being released, Subaru stood up giving his hand a shake while whining about the pain. Staring at Subaru with one eye closed, Kenichi made a small snort with his nose,

⁶² Engrish flip. Means “super”, “perfect”, “high-tech” (超高の, 完璧な, 高度技術の, respectively), originally “スーパー”, “パーフェクト”, “ハイテク” (“super”, “perfect”, “high-tech”, respectively).

⁶³ Note by TranslationChicken: Two mundane statements followed by a punchline. Or could also refer to three jokes told in succession. In Manzai comedy, the straight-man objects to the funny-man’s statements.

Kenichi: “I got that feeling this morning, but just now it’s like something suddenly changed about you again. What’s with that.”

Subaru: “I told you, didn’t I. It’s, because I have someone I like.”

A silver light was leading Natsuki Subaru by the hand.

Subaru: “And there’s also, someone who told me they loved me, even in spite of what I am.”

A warm, sky-blue radiance was tenderly pushing on Natsuki Subaru’s back.

Subaru: “They, don’t know I am Natsuki Kenichi’s son. When I am with them, I am only Natsuki Subaru... No,”

Shaking his head, he fixed his eyes on his father standing in front of him,

Subaru: “No matter who I am in front of, I am always Natsuki Subaru. I brought it on myself to carry that strange signboard on my back, when I was actually being crushed by a weight that was never there. I finally understand it, now.”

Kenichi: “Well that was super late. I’m the big black pillar holding this family up, here. I never asked you to be the head of the family, who gave you the idea to carry a burden like that. I should smack ya.”

Subaru: “You did plenty of stuff more painful than smacking already!”

Seeing Subaru stomping on the ground in protest of the previous attacks, Kenichi laughed “My bad my bad” like he was apologizing on someone else’s behalf. Then, squinting his eyes into thin lines, Kenichi continued “Compared to that,”

Kenichi: “You said there was someone you like, and then you said there’s someone who likes you, but, what? You... Are you a two-timer? With only a Subaru-rank?”

Subaru: “Don’t call it a Subaru-rank! Although I totally realize it’s too luxurious for my level! But so what!? There can be two stars in the highest place, what’s wrong with that!”

It was not just him being defiant, for those were Subaru’s honest feelings at that moment.

He loved Emilia. And he loved Rem. Those two made Subaru stand up and walk forward, whether it was to stand in front of Kenichi or to face the self of his past, they gave him the strength to not run away.

All the sea of stars that once covered over Subaru's sky — All the glittering starlight he once saw gazing upwards.

Overhead now, blinding, brighter than the light of all those stars combined, was the radiance of the star belonging to those two. And all around that brightest star, even the stars that should have vanished long ago now came to glow with a different light.

It was outside of his shut-in room, inadvertently summoned to the parallel world, through desperation, suffering, sorrow, wailing as he cried, screaming in anger, charging in with a smile on his face, enthusiastically advancing forward, that Subaru won this starlit sky.

Kenichi: "Well, that's alright. Do as you like. Long as you get a perfect ending out of it without breaking the law, I won't have any objections. Looks like, you got some talent for duping girls too, huh."

Subaru: "If I had talents like that, I wouldn't have failed so miserably on my first day of high school and ended up all alone. I can't pull off miracles like you, dad."

Kenichi: "I don't think that's true, you know? You're my son, after all. And although you got all sorts of things wrong, that's the one thing you got most wrong."

Subaru: "That one?"

Tapping the fingers on his cross arms, Kenichi answered the confused looking Subaru with an "En", nodding,

Kenichi: "I may be hyperactive in front of you and mom, but dad knows how to sort out the TPO⁶⁴ for these things, you know? I was always like this in front of you, so maybe you got the wrong idea, but if you act like dad in front of everyone, of course people are gonna avoid ya, oy."

Subaru: "Wa, wai-wait..."

⁶⁴ Loan-word abbreviation meaning "(appropriate) time, place and occasion".

Kenichi: “It’s obvious, isn’t it? If you see a guy with this kind of *tenshun* on the first meeting, you’ll be scared to even come near him, right? From there until you become good friends, you still have to straighten-up your collar. You only get to take off a button on your shirt when it’s hot out. Otherwise, it’s patience from April to June.”

That was the shocking truth. In reality, even his father changes his attitude depending on the target, just like a normal person.

Without knowing this, he had believed that if he only acted like his father, he would be loved by those around him just like his father was. Such was the shallowness of his mind.

Subaru: “All that time I spent stagnant...”

Kenichi: “Well, it wasn’t all useless, I think. In fact, you got to become who you are now because of it. Those stars you found, aren’t they worth the time you spent looking for them?”

Subaru, hugging his head in regret, lifted up his face as he heard those words. He could answer that question without a moment’s hesitation, for he already knew the answer, beyond all doubt.

Subaru: “—No, it was worth it. No matter how many chances I get, I would want to chase after the same stars as I am now. So, I think I like the way I am now.”

Kenichi: “Is that so... Then, that was all great, wasn’t it?”

Relieved to see Subaru resolve this in his heart, Kenichi smiled.

And facing that smile, Subaru felt the heavy lump in his chest dropping with a thud. The darkness within him cleared, as if all the feelings of gloom had been washed away.

Although it was a selfish and conceited emotion, to Subaru right now, it was salvation.

After facing his past, saying goodbye to his old self while embracing and accepting all that he had been, he was proud of this present self that was now walking forward. And so—

Subaru: “I’m sorry, for all the times I closed myself off. I’m sorry I made you worry with all the emotion I can’t sort out and refusing to go to school. I know I was wrong now. I’m really sorry.”

Kenichi: “It’s ok, you don’t have to. It’s my fault for not realizing how amazingly awesome you imagined me to be. I should be the one to say sorry, for being way too awesome in your eyes!”

Subaru: “Even though it’s a fact, after you put it like that I totally don’t want to admit it now!”

Kenichi: “Hahaha, no need to be embarrassed. You’re my son, and you have my blood in your veins. You definitely have the potential to become someone half as awesome as me.”

Subaru: “Only half? I thought new generations are supposed to overtake the old ones.”

Kenichi: “Well you also got half of you from your mom. With my awesomeness and good looks, combined with the other part from your mom, they kinda canceled each other out, you know.”

Subaru: “Sorry mom, I have no counter to that!”

Unable to say anything to exonerate his mom who wasn’t there, Subaru clapped his hands together and apologized to thin air. Amused to see this gesture from him, Kenichi shook his head,

Kenichi: “Well then, that’s a load off your shoulders, right? All the walking-in-place from before is already done, there’s no point dwelling on them anymore, all that matters now is what you do from now on.”

Subaru: “Yeah, en. I’m, sorry I made you worry...”

Kenichi: “If you want to apologize for something like that, you should take the time to properly repay our kindness. One day, you’ll have to take good care of me and mom you know, my eldest son.”

—As he heard those words, Subaru grew still.

Subaru: “———”

He had made up his mind to apologize for everything that had happened before, and he was determined to confess all the feelings of his present self.

He had accomplished it well, the years of accumulated barriers between them had melted, and he could now face his parents with a clear heart. Everything he had wanted to say up to now—

Subaru: “——Gu.”

That — was the moment he was about to say “From now on”, what surged up instead through Subaru’s entire body was,

Subaru: “...Ple... Please forgive me.”

Kenichi: “Subaru?”

Subaru: “I’m so...I’m sorry, I’m so sorry... I’m, I’m sorry I’m sorry...I’m so sorry...”

The confused Kenichi’s voice came from in front of him. Yet Subaru could no longer make out his face.

The flood of overflowing tears had blocked up Subaru’s vision, and the shapes of the world grew blurred. Covering his face with his palms, he desperately tried to wipe away the stream of tears. But even wiping, and wiping, he could not stop the tears from flowing. They cannot be stopped and would not be stopped.

Subaru: “Forgive me, please forgive me... I—I’m...There’s only, you two... I’m sorry, I’m so sorry...”

—He had realized it.

Somewhere within his heart, Subaru had realized it long ago.

From the moment he was summoned to this parallel world, bathed under the light of the sun, when he squinted his eyes within the blinding flash of that instant, as if it were a revelation, Subaru knew.

—That he would never return to his original world again.

Having spilled his heart to his father, having confessed the dark emotions that had accumulated inside his chest, having been granted forgiveness, having been lent the strength to walk forward, having been taught and brought up to know how,

Subaru: “Despite all of that, I... I can’t repay you anything... I will, never get to see you again... I’m sorry. I’m sorry, I’m sorry... I’m so sorry. I’m so sorry. I’m so sorry.”

The tears would not stop. He was about to fall to his knees.

But even so, Subaru remained standing, because stopping him from collapsing, was a hug from in front that wrapped the crying Subaru’s body within its arms.



Illustration from Volume 10, coloring by Norvak ([source](#))

The palms were strong and broad, they pressed his son, who was almost as tall as he was, tightly into him, yet, like consoling a weeping child, they patted and caressed his back.

Kenichi: “—No matter where or when, you’re still a pain-in-the-ass son. Geez.”

As he said this, he continued holding onto the sobbing Subaru, soothingly, and lovingly, and did not let go.

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Kenichi: “Have you calmed down?”

Subaru: “—Yeah. Sorry. That must be, really annoying.”

Kenichi: “No kidding. Just look at my shirt. I’ve got dried out tears and snot all over my chest now. I’m too embarrassed to even wander around the neighborhood like this.”

“Haha”, using his fingers to give Subaru, who had stopped crying, a flick to the forehead, Kenichi let out a vulgar laugh.

With a grin, he stared at Subaru’s face, that was now swollen from the tears. Seeing those eyes filled with sadness and apology, Kenichi sighed,

Kenichi: “I don’t know why you cried so hard, but that must have been kinda embarrassing for ya, so I’ll keep it a secret. Try to thank me as best you can, ok?”

Subaru: “...Aah. Thank you. Truly, from the bottom of my heart, more than anyone else in the world.”

Kenichi: “Well I’m gonna blush if you put it like that.”

Scratching his face looking embarrassed, Kenichi chuckled. Unable to stare at his father’s face directly for too long, Subaru averted his eyes.

Kenichi shrugged his shoulders, and flapped his hands around like he was trying to drive away insects,

Kenichi: “Gees, now get yourself back home, you crybaby. Dad’s in the mood for walking around a bit more, so I’ll take the long way back. If I’m seen with ya while you’re sobbing, people are gonna think something strange.”

Subaru: “...They’ll wonder what on earth a pair of father and son our age could be doing together, huh.”

Kenichi: “Yeah no kidding. If I go back with you like this, my friends are gonna hear about it and embarrass me with it, you know.”

Subaru: “That line could be fatal depending on who you say it to, so be careful how you use it!”

Inadvertently blurting out another straight-man counter to his father’s words, Subaru’s heart was stabbed with the pain of nostalgia. Clenching his teeth and forcing himself to turn his face away, Subaru managed to spit out the words “So uh”,

Subaru: “I’ll be going on ahead, then. Try not to get questioned by the police or anything.”

Kenichi: “Sorry to disappoint ya, but all the police officers around here know me. If they come and holla at me, I can’t really ignore them, can I.”

Subaru: “Just please don’t do anything except holla back.”

That attitude from Kenichi hadn’t changed at all. Once again feeling saved by it, Subaru felt disgusted by how his own powerlessness was still no better than before. No matter where he was, he still had to rely on others to protect him. He was so hopeless that way.

But more than anything, he didn’t want to show his weakness in front of Kenichi anymore.

So after exhaling a sharp breath, as if he had made up his mind, Subaru turned his back to his father and swung out his step. And with hurried steps, he tried to disappear from that place as quickly as he could.

Kenichi: “—Hey, Subaru.”

From behind, Kenichi’s voice called to him, and his legs inadvertently stopped moving.

Kenichi: “You’re, going through all sorts of things too, huh. So, I just say this one thing.”

Subaru: “———”

Kenichi: “Give it your best. I’m counting on you, son.”

The fear of being counted on, the fear of disappointing.

The worry that he would betray his father’s expectations had grasped Subaru for so long, refusing to let go. It was because of it, that to Subaru, his father’s expectations had turned into a symbol of fear—

Subaru: “—Yeah, leave it to me. Dad.”

Still with his back turned, Subaru stuck a finger toward the sky, and,

Subaru: “My name is Natsuki Subaru. Son of Natsuki Kenichi— Therefore I can accomplish anything, and will do anything it takes. Your son is really awesome, you know.”

Kenichi: “Yeah, I know. Half of you came from me, after all!”

At the end of those words Kenichi showered a volley of laughter upon Subaru’s back.

Listening to its sound, a smile came onto Subaru’s lips. With his back to his father, he swung out his strides.

His knees were no longer shaking. His heart no longer wavered. He only stared straight ahead as he walked.

—The one whose back he had always watched from behind, will be watching him from behind from now on.

Amazed, by how much strength he could draw from a fact as simple as this.

Subaru continued walking, without stopping.

Arc 4 Chapter 19 - Homework

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 10, Chapter 4 “Parent and Child”, Parts 7-9

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Parts 3+4](#)

—After saying goodbye to his father, Subaru, while reorganizing the thoughts in his mind, slowly made his way through the familiar townscape, on the road leading to home.

As he walked on, a myriad of emotions had been surging through his heart.

He hadn’t taken a stroll in the sun at an hour like this ever since he stopped going to school, but the feeling of sunlight on his skin was probably not the only reason why the scenery he had walked through so many times before felt different this time.

Subaru: “Well, a kid who’s skipping school can’t really go shamelessly prancing around under the Great Sun-sama, after all.”

It wouldn’t be good if word got around the neighborhood, or if he wound up getting lectured by a police officer. Even if Subaru had subconsciously wanted his father and mother to hate him, he wasn’t exactly planning to pull the police into it.

The streets around his home were full of memories. As if soaking it all in, and confirming it with the soles of his feet, passing through the quiet — Or rather, completely unpopulated residential streets, by the time he no longer noticed the sensation of dried up tears on his cheeks, he had arrived at the front door of his house.

Taking in a deep breath, he halted.

Closing his eyes, going through the multitude of emotions in his heart, and gulping them all down,

Subaru: “—I’m home.”

Opening the door, he sent these words into the house.

Feeling a bit nervous, he waited for the reply. But the response that should have greeted him still didn't come. Sensing something strange and furrowing his brows, Subaru took off his shoes and stepped into the house. Then, looking around for his mother who should be home,

Subaru: "...Ohaiy—"

—In front of the refrigerator, looking back at him, his mother was holding a bottle of mayonnaise in her mouth.

Subaru: "...I'm back."

All the tenseness up to now suddenly vanishing without a trace— Subaru dropped down his shoulders, smiling wryly, and more or less accepted that situation.

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Subaru: "There was no reply, I was starting to worry if something happened."

Naoko: "What else could have happened. See, mom's mayonnaise bottle is empty. So I stole your dad's mayonnaise to slurp on and... Recently, I've been getting the feeling that Subaru's voice is becoming really similar to dad's. If you're on the phone I wouldn't even be able to tell the difference."

Subaru: "The topic kind of jumped there, but basically, you couldn't tell the difference between my voice and dad's, so you tried hiding, huh. No, but, if you were trying to hide you'd want to be a bit more sneaky about it."

Facing his mother, who was sucking on the mayo, Subaru took the caved-in bottle from her and let it expand back to its original shape, before putting it down on the table. Staring at him, Naoko tilted her neck,

Naoko: "Keep it a secret from your dad, ok? But see, slurping on your dad's mayonnaise, I get my favorite mayonnaise flavor combined with your dad's flavor at the same time, it's a great bargain isn't it?"

Subaru: “That sounds like the perverted testimony of a kid who steals a girl’s recorder to lick it! Combining one favorite thing with another favorite thing to make something better, are you a kindergartener!?”

Naoko: “So, what happened to your dad? Did you leave him behind? Subaru, when did you get fast enough to be able to leave your dad behind?”

Subaru: “It’s not like I could win against dad in race in the first pla... But, well, maybe.”

Just as he was about to immediately refute his mother’s question, Subaru swallowed it back into his chest.

When was the last time he had a race with his dad? Back then, his father didn’t behave like an adult at all, and would mercilessly leave Subaru way behind in the dust. Despondently watching his father’s back vanishing into the distance, perhaps even at that point, a small sense of admiration had been sprouting in his heart.

But how many years had already passed since then? If he raced with his father again, surely he wouldn’t be left that far behind, or, he might even win.

That admiration only ever enlarging, Kenichi’s existence inside Subaru had grown to an enormous size. All the while, having misunderstood its true essence, no one else could have saved him from it.

Subaru: “In the end, I still give up on everything half-way, huh.”

Saying this while leaning backwards and squeaking the back of his chair, Subaru flung out a big stretch. And, watching him do this, Naoko placed her hand over her lips and laughed,

Subaru: “What is it? Was something funny?”

Naoko: “I thought, that gesture looks just like your father. Even back then, your dad likes to stretch on the back of his chair. He’d put too much force into it and throw himself right over.”

Subaru: “It’s not just the voice, even our movements are similar, huh. I really can’t tell if that’s good or bad right now.”

Naoko: “But I think it’s a good thing— You’re his son, after all.”

Badump — A single large thump sounded in his chest, and Subaru desperately tried to stop a groan from seeping out of his throat. Seeing his expression stiffen and his eyes growing wide, Naoko blinked several times with her sharp eyes, that looked exactly like Subaru's. Breathing in through his nose, Subaru managed to calm down the pounding of his heart, and,

Subaru: "I feel like I won't have the strength to leave again, if I stay here for too long..."

Saying this, he stood up from his chair. With his mother's confused gaze looking up at him, Subaru scratched his cheek, as he turned,

Subaru: "So um, there's something I want to ask."

Naoko: "Hmhm, I'm listening."

With an unconcerned air, as if pretending not to notice his reluctance and hesitation, Naoko occasionally glanced back and forth between him and the mayonnaise. The desire to hear her son continue his words, was probably as attractive as the impulse to continue slurping mayonnaise down her throat.

Taken aback at seeing his mother still not having changed a bit, Subaru's face broke into a small smile,

Subaru: "—Do you, remember where my school uniform is stowed away?"

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—He slid his arms through the dress shirt's perfectly ironed sleeves, and inserted his legs into the neatly folded trousers. Tightening his belt in front of the mirror, after an epic struggle he managed to tie up the dark green necktie. Then, putting on the navy-blue blazer,

Subaru: "Student Natsuki Subaru, complete... It must have been about three months now."

Confirming in front of the mirror that his transformation was complete, Subaru exhaled a deep breath as if having finished a big task.

The reflection in the mirror, was of a school uniform that hadn't been worn in a very long time. Being a blazer-styled uniform, it was a pain to have to tie the necktie every morning, as even to be stripped of a minute of precious sleeping time was extremely annoying.

Even after tying it every day for two years, it still hadn't gotten better at all, and the knot still looked just as dopey. At the same time, there was a complicated feeling at the thought of this being his last chance to do it.

Subaru: "Should I try to get it perfect since it's the last time, or should I do it like I always did it?"

Even while mumbling this, the answer already appeared in his heart.

Lightly flicking the swollen bulge of his necktie, leaving the awkward knot intact, Subaru turned away from the mirror. And, looking around the room, he picked up his backpack. No matter how you look at it, it was the image of a model student ready to go to school.

Subaru: "Too bad it's way past homeroom, it's already time for the third period to start. Leaving the house after the sun's already finished rising, what kind of crap model student does that."

Scratching his head while smiling wryly, Subaru did a stretch on the spot, and headed out of the room — But just before leaving, he turned around to take another good look at his old room.

In all his life, Subaru had never moved houses, so this had been the only place he could have called "my room". From the time he entered middle school, for almost six years, he had been sleeping and waking inside this room — This would be last time he would see this place.

Subaru: "——"

Without a word, Subaru quietly lowered his head.

Into that one gesture alone, was instilled the memories of all those six years.

With a long, long bow, he finished his farewell, and then, enthusiastically lifting up his face, Subaru turned his back to his room. With the sound of the door closing behind him, he made his way down the stairs, to find Naoko waiting in the living room, with her sharp eyes opened wide with surprise,

Naoko: “Oh my. When you asked for the uniform, I thought you were going to burn it. I made all sorts of preparations too... Now it’s all wasted.”

Subaru: “When your son asked for his uniform the first thing you thought of was pyromania? And while we’re on this topic, are those taros and skewered hot dogs you prepared assuming there was going to be a fire...?”

Seeing a whole array of ingredients lined up on the table, Subaru was at a loss for words at his mother’s happy-go-lucky reaction that defied all expectations. On the other hand, Naoko seemed completely unconcerned about Subaru’s twitching face as she looked over his change of clothes from head to toe.

Naoko: “Hmhm, looks good. They make you look like an adult, and kind of cancels out the eyes, and make you look toned-down a bit.”

Subaru: “Mom you’re currently robbing me of that tone-down as we speak!”

Naoko: “Why are you so touchy? Want to lick some mayonnaise to calm down?”

Subaru: “I’m not really in the mood right now...”

Naoko: “Is-that-so.”

The bottle of mayonnaise she held out had a giant “S” written on the cap indicating it as Subaru’s personal mayonnaise. Only, Naoko seemed to have expected that reply from Subaru, and simply nodded,

Naoko: “But Subaru, you don’t seem to actually like mayonnaise very much.”

Subaru: “_____”

Naoko: “It’s because you love dad and mom, that you lick it together with us, isn’t it?”

Putting the mayonnaise with the Subaru-seal down on the table, spinning it round and round, Naoko said these words. And on the receiving end, Subaru’s throat clogged up. Shocked, his lips trembled, and his breathing stopped,

Subaru: “Wh—what gave you tha...”

Naoko: “Then, Subaru, the world or mayonnaise, which do you choose?”

Subaru: “Um, the world...”

Naoko: “You see?”

Subaru: “What kind of example is that!! Why do you have a triumphant look on your face! A guy who would choose mayonnaise over the world doesn’t love mayonnaise, he just hates the world!”

Protesting against Naoko’s considerably off-beat remark, Subaru breathed heavily while scowling at the bottle of mayonnaise on the table. Then, with a small snort,

Subaru: “...For how long, have you been thinking that?”

Naoko: “Since a long time ago. Dad and mom will always get depressed without mayonnaise, like the world is coming to an end, but Subaru isn’t like that.”

Subaru: “The hurdle you expect of me is way too high, it’s throwing me into despair, you know.”

Subaru deflated at his mother’s words. But his heart was not calm.

Subaru’s status as a mayo-lover was not in question. Without fail, whenever condiments are concerned, he would never leave out mayonnaise. He’d naturally dip all deep-fried foods in mayonnaise. His devotion was to the point of rubbing mayonnaise on already mayonnaise-flavored snacks.

But why, had he always been so attached to mayonnaise—

Subaru: “It looked like you two were really enjoying it, so I wanted to enjoy it the same way too. Now that I think about it, I’m a father-con and mother-con, a total fami-con⁶⁵...”

Naoko: “Without the «super» in front?”

Subaru: “Super family complex, aka super-fami⁶⁶... Ugh nevermind.”

⁶⁵ Note by TranslationChicken: Famicon is another name for the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) game console.

⁶⁶ Note by TranslationChicken: Super Famicon is another for the sequel to the NES, the Super Entertainment System (SNES).

In the middle of this completely pointless exchange, Subaru gave his head a shake and sighed. Then, slowly lifting up the mayonnaise bottle from the table,

Naoko: “Ah—”

Subaru: “—Pffhhuaa. Uuummu, so good! After going so long without genuine mayonnaise, there’s just nothing like it! The improvised mayonnaise on the other side is pretty good too, but the unhealthy store-bought kind with the artificial colorings are the real deals!! The ones over there are just mayo-neese⁶⁷!”

Squeezing the almost-full bottle flat, he swallowed all the mayonnaise in one gulp. Savoring its sourness passing over his tongue, he let the burning sensation run down his throat and chest. This is the true *mayonazingu*⁶⁸ that mayo-addicts can never stop loving.

Using the back of his hand to wipe off a white stain left on the corner of his mouth, Subaru lifted up his head in front of the surprised Naoko.

Subaru: “I may not love mayonnaise as much as you two, but I am nonetheless a true and fervent disciple of mayonnaise-love. I swear it, on the bottle caps of all the mayonnaise I have licked to this day.”

On a side note, the bottle caps of every mayonnaise Subaru had personally consumed in his lifetime were being stored away inside the closet of his room. The collection had since swelled to an uncanny number of 776. With the addition of the one just now, that number became 777.

Subaru: “It’s the triple-seventh. Help me put it in the closet later.”

Naoko: “Ooooooh, three-sevens is a pretty lucky number. We were so delighted too when your dad hit four-sevens the other day.”

Subaru: “That is literally love of an entirely different magnitude!”

His mother happily took the emptied mayonnaise bottle from him. For a moment, Subaru sulked at his sense of accomplishment being spoiled, but immediately recovering his expression again,

⁶⁷ Thanks to TranslationChicken for the hint: “mayoneese” (マヨネーゼ) is a pun on “mayonnaise” (マヨネーズ), and is mayo-lover jargon for low-quality/poorly-tasting mayos. For more info on mayo-lovers, google “マヨラー”.

⁶⁸ The katakana literally says “mayonazing” (マヨネーシング) in English, there’s no optimal way around doing it in Romaji.

Subaru: “So um... I guess, it’s time I should go, then.”

Naoko: “Ah, if you’re going to the convenience store, buy some cream tarts while you’re there, I suddenly want to eat them really badly.”

Subaru: “Considering what I’m wearing, can you use a little imagination before saying that!?”

Spreading out both his arms, he made that appeal. Seeing Subaru do this, Naoko laughed “Just kidding just kidding”,

Naoko: “But, you’re going to school now? Even though mom is really glad... Won’t you stand out if you get there so late? Why not just go tomorrow?”

Subaru: “Don’t cripple your son’s fledgling motivation right from outset. I only just barely got a little willpower put together by being a little harsher on others and a little more lenient on myself.”

Naoko: “If Subaru was that kind of child, then your mom wouldn’t have had such a hard time.”

Even with Subaru sneaking that self-deprecating comment in there, Naoko still replied as if she didn’t get the point. Then, squinting her eyes and standing up with an “Al-right-then”,

Naoko: “Just wait a minute for mom to fetch her jacket.”

Subaru: “Wait... You, don’t mean to come with me, right? It’s not some kind of punishment game where parents personally accompany their ex-hikikomori child to school, is it!?”

Naoko: “Ok, but I won’t go all the way to school. I’ll just go up to the convenience store and get some mayonnaise and cream puffs. You’re a big boy now.”

Subaru: “Wha—!? Why does that sound like I begged you to come with me!?”

While Subaru was bemoaning the unacceptable flow of the conversation, his mother only casually dodged it with “Right right” while heading up to her room. And so, it was decided that she will accompany him half of the way to school.

Subaru: “Noonooo... Give me a break. Geez.”

As he said this, Subaru's cheeks softened with a tinge of relief.

—Even if only for a little while, the time to say goodbye to his mother had been delayed, and thinking this, Subaru grew keenly aware of how weak he really was.

Naoko: "It's been a long time since I walked with Subaru like this."

Subaru: "Has it? If it's at night, we come out on shopping expeditions all the time, right?"

Naoko: "Haaa. You see, the flow of the conversation just now obviously meant noon. You have to think about what's beyond the words before responding."

Subaru: "I'm just, finding observational advice coming from mom a bit hard to swallow!"

Natsuki Naoko's observational skills were probably the worst in the world, to an almost demon-possessed degree.

That was the common understanding within the Natsuki family, or between Subaru and Kenichi, at least. The truth is, up against Naoko, no matter what kind of allegory or sarcasm was thrown at her, it would be nearly impossible to explain it to her afterward. Since she herself never seems to realize it, everything just naturally bounces right off her, and stress will gradually build up the more one interacts with her.

Yet, in spite of that, Subaru still enjoys talking with his mother.

Naoko: "I'm so glad it's warm today. What did you talk about with your father?"

Subaru: "Ooof, conversations-with-mother 101— Expect the first half and the second half to not be connected at all. Anyways, it wasn't anything in particular, it was just uhh..."

Walking side by side on the road to school, Subaru wracked his brain for an answer to his mother's question.

If he told her all the details of his conversation with Kenichi, he would be forced to mention the embarrassing inner workings of his inferiority complex, and he couldn't exactly leave out the part where he cried, either.

Even though he knew it was necessary, it was only the surge of emotions of that moment, and he didn't know what it would become if he brought it out again now. That's why,

Subaru: "It's no big deal...We talked about Ikeda-san for a bit and told some stories about the past."

Naoko: "Aah, Ikeda-kun. He won big on a horse-ticket and moved to Thailand, then he got swindled by his local young wife out of everything he had, and ended up being driven into hard manual labor while getting scorched all black."

Subaru: "That's the first time I heard of the miserable developments of the second half!?"

Naoko: "He sent a letter to us, saying «I couldn't get used to the dirty money after all. Right now, my body may be undergoing hardships, but my heart is fulfilled»."

Subaru: "Huh... So you went through a transformation owing to your experiences in an unknown place too, Ikeda-san... I can totally relate to that!"

The only difference was exchanging the parallel world with a foreign country, and Subaru's circumstances would have been pretty much the same as Ikeda-san's. Unexpectedly finding a fellow traveler here, Subaru quietly wished him the best of luck.

Then, seeing Subaru's reaction, his mother tilted her neck with "Nnnn~."

Naoko: "So, those stories of the past made you feel like going to school?"

Subaru: "Aah, well, that's the short version of it. It was a chance for me to look back on how I've gotten myself worried over all sorts of absurd things. And so I—"

Naoko: "—Stopped wanting to do everything exactly the same way as your dad."

Subaru: "———"

Originally hoping to gloss it over so he would not have to explain, Subaru suddenly found himself cornered by Naoko's words.

The smile on the side of her face did not change, nor did her sharp, and gentle eyes. In fact, perhaps that wasn't the intention behind her words, after all. But even so, Subaru felt like his heart had taken a direct hit when she pointed it out without him ever mentioning it.

Subaru fell silent, and happily walking ahead of him, Naoko was swinging her arms in wide arcs.

Naoko: "It's because Subaru always tries so hard, and wants to do everything at once. And since your dad has all kinds of crazy interests, you had all sorts of opportunities too... You must be exhausted."

Subaru: "M-mom... Just how much, do you know about me..."

Naoko: "Well let's see, Subaru."

As if she had known it all along, hearing his true feelings that he had even been hiding from himself coming out his mother's lips, Subaru couldn't utter another word.

At the call of his name, Subaru lifted his face. Cutting in front of him, his mother stopped still, and stared straight into Subaru's eyes,

Naoko: "People often say, children watch their parents closer than their parents realize."

Subaru: "..."

Naoko: "But the opposite is also true. Parents also watch over their children more than their children realize. Mom has been watching Subaru more than Subaru realizes too, you know?"

Hearing this, Subaru couldn't help but fall dumb and stupefied.

All the secrets he thought he had been keeping to himself, in reality, had been just a wasted effort. Withdrawing himself, putting on an air as if no one in the world could understand his pain, how vain and thoughtless he must have been.

Naoko: "And when you were little, mom had to put suppositories in your butt, so I even know what your asshole looks like. That means mom has seen every part of Subaru's body except the internal organs, you know."

Subaru: “S—sorry. It was going well for a bit, but it didn’t seem incredibly necessary to mention the last part just now.”

Even twin brothers don’t really get to see each other’s internal organs. In fact, even Subaru himself hadn’t had that many opportunities to see his himself. There were just the one or two times when Subaru got the chance, but that was it.

Anyways,

Subaru: “So whether it was my reason for liking mayonnaise, or being a hikikomori...”

Naoko: “If there was something mom could do to help, mom would do it. But no matter what mom does, it seems it’ll only make a mess of things. Still,”

With a little smile, she continued, gazing straight into Subaru’s black pupils,

Naoko: “It seems there was someone other than mom and dad, who did something for Subaru in the end. I think that’s great. I really should thank that person.”

Subaru: “...Hm, yeah. There was someone who taught me how hopeless I was when I was hopeless. And there was someone who told my hopeless self that I wasn’t entirely without hope. It’s because of them, that I can walk forward like this now.”

They made him aware of his own foolishness, and accepted him nonetheless. It was only because of them that Subaru could stand against his past — and face his parents this way. Ah, really.

Subaru: “They’re...way too good for me.”

Naoko: “But, you won’t give them away or anything, right?”

Subaru: “Of course not. Whether or not I deserve them is one thing. But if I have to give them away, I’d rather hang on to them, and try to pile up my self-worth later on.”

Naoko: “Hmhm— You’re every bit his son, after all.”

They were words that held a special significance to Subaru.

Yet his mother understood this, and surely knew what those words meant to him. To say them even while knowing that,

Subaru: “Can I really live up to it? Can I really be worthy of being his son?”

Naoko: “No problem. Well, since half of Subaru came from mom, you’ll meet the quota if you just become half as awesome as dad.”

Subaru: “So you already knew that your part of the genes that made up my body are inferior!?”

Naoko: “Well half of you is already made of your dad’s coolness... for the remaining half, why not just be Subaru?”

Seeing Subaru unmoved, Naoko gave this reply. And upon hearing these words, Subaru only felt dumb, with his mouth open.

Naoko: “You don’t have to be totally-and-totally the same as your dad. Because if Subaru is exactly the same as dad, then there’ll be two dads, and mom will get all confused, you know?”

Subaru: “A feminine heart wavering between husband and son, what are we, in an erotic novel!?”

Naoko: “No don’t, stop it, nyaaaa~!”

Subaru: “Guh— Whaaaaaaaaa!?”

No sooner had Subaru’s finished his last word, than a fist came flying over to hide her blush.

Eating an unexpectedly powerful right-hook straight in the face, Subaru went flying backwards. While he was almost crying from the pain, Naoko quickly turned her back and,

Naoko: “So that’s why, mom thinks Subaru should do his best.”

Subaru: “That’s a nice summary, but I’m kind of bleeding here.”

Naoko: “Speaking of blood, don’t iron pipes taste kind of like blood when you lick them?”

Subaru: “It’s kind of hard to imagine the kind of extreme situation where... Anyways, conversations-with-mother intermediate lesson, expect totally random questions after sudden loss of direction.”

It'd be useless even if he painstakingly tried to explain how blood contains iron similarly how iron pipes are made of iron. If he took these kind of questions seriously here, he would only get "How come you're going off-topic now?" or something similarly aggravating and unreasonable in return.

Therefore, ignoring the context of everything,

Subaru: "I should just be myself, huh."

Naoko: "Right right. While trying to be like your dad, also be Subaru."

Naoko looked satisfied at finally getting to a conclusion. Then, suddenly halting her steps in front of Subaru, Naoko pointed to the right side of the split in the road up ahead.

Naoko: "Well, the convenience store is this way, so mom will only go up to here... Will you be ok by yourself?"

Subaru: "There's no need to wor— Actually I'm seriously injured here, yeah."

Naoko wasn't excessively worried.

But if Subaru hesitated now, he'd just be way too much of a coward in his mother's eyes, wouldn't he? So, to put his mother's mind at rest,

Subaru: "It's fine. The things I have to do, and the things I want to do, are exactly the same right now. I have no reason to close myself off anymore."

Naoko: "Is that so? That's good. Then, do your best."

Nodding with relief at Subaru's answer, Naoko skipped away with little steps toward the road that split off into the right. Subaru's path was to the left, so he must part with his mother here.

But if they went their separate ways now, he knew, without a doubt, that their parting will be far, far longer than his mother realized—

Subaru: "Mom—!"

Unable to endure watching his mother's back disappear, Subaru called out loudly for his mother to stop.

His mother, already carried away by her quest for mayonnaise, stopped her skipping steps and turned her body around. Just the same as always, the sight of his mother's unchanged figure imprinted itself into his eyes.

Subaru: "Ah..."

Goodbye, trying to come up with some kind of goodbye, Subaru hesitated.

Right now, if he doesn't say his goodbyes here, his mother will have no idea just how long their parting will be. Subaru would lose the chance to see his mother breaking down crying, knowing they will never meet again. But if he didn't want his last memory of his mother to be her face covered in tears, it would be better if he kept his mouth shut.

Yet if he did that, it would be a lie told under the pretense that he was sparing the other person and himself—

Subaru: "—There is, something I absolutely have to do. So this goodbye will be for a very long time."

—And Natsuki Subaru's heart would not allow that.

Having been told these words, Naoko didn't say a thing. And before she could react, Subaru pressed on,

Subaru: "It's somewhere a bit far away, and there's no way to communicate. There will be all sorts of, worrying things. But it's definitely not dangerous... Though I can't really guarantee that. Oh, what am I saying, honestly it's because it's a horribly dangerous place that I have to go back to save them."

Speaking quickly. Piling on the information. All the things he wanted to say spilled out.

Subaru: "Mom and dad will be worried, I think. Unlike up to yesterday, when we could always see each other, it's a place where you'll have no way to see me. But no matter where I am, I'll be thinking of you two, and I'll never forget..."

Naoko: "Subaru."

Subaru: "I will never not want to be your child anymore, and I won't do anything that I'd hate myself for. Even though I know, after what I said, you won't be able to watch me go without worrying, but I..."

Naoko: “Subaru.”

No longer knowing what he was saying anymore, his mother’s voice suddenly stopped him.

Lifting up his face, his mother was standing right in front of him.

Naoko: “Subaru— It’s alright.”

Subaru: “...It’s, alright?”

Naoko: “Because I understand, what Subaru is trying to say. So there’s no need to try so hard to find the words.”

Subaru: “You understand... How...?”

Naoko: “Because mom is Subaru’s mom, after all.”

—That was a completely illogical statement, but there was no room for any counterarguments at all. The depth of his eyes grew hot. That feeling, was the same as what he felt only an hour ago.

Just how many times will Subaru have to cry like a little child? Always shedding tears at everything like this, when will he ever grow an iron heart that doesn’t waver against such things?

Subaru: “I’m still... just like a little child... It’s so embarrassing...”

Naoko: “If crying when you want to cry is embarrassing, then all the little babies are totally embarrassing when they’re born.”

Subaru: “That’s... not what I meant...”

Naoko: “Hmhm, I know. In front of mom and dad, no matter how old Subaru becomes... You should cry whenever you want to cry.”

The world was blurring beyond the overflowing tears. Hiding behind his sleeves while wiping his eyes, Subaru didn’t want his mother to see his face like this. And Naoko didn’t peek, out of respect for his wish.

Only, slowly, gently, she caressed Subaru’s hair while standing on tiptoes.

Subaru: "...Sorry, mom. I, in the end I, can't do anything for you two..."

Naoko: "We didn't give birth to you expecting something in return, you know? We had you because we wanted to do something for you. It's because mom loves you, that mom gave birth to Subaru."

—The love described by those words, Subaru had already experienced them countless times before.

Naoko: "If you want to do something for mom and dad, just pass that same feeling onto someone else. It could be the girl Subaru loves, and if you make a baby with her, pass it onto the baby... That would be the best way, wouldn't it?"

Subaru: "...Yeah, it would be."

Naoko: "See. Stuff mom says can never go wrong you know."

With a satisfied giggle, Naoko tickled Subaru's forelock with her finger. Then, pushing on his chest to make him take a step back, she looked Subaru over from head to toe,

Naoko: "When your face gets messy from crying, it looks more and more like mom's, it's kind of weird."

Subaru: "...I'm, impressed you'd use your own face as an analogy."

Naoko: "I draw my confidence from the fact that it's the face your dad loves. So, sharing mom's confidence, Subaru can also draw confidence from your dad's love, you know."

Subaru: "Even though it's only because of the face!"

Forcibly wiping his face with his sleeves, it had become red-hot around his eyes when the tears finally stopped.

Crying his heart out, exposing his true feelings only to be consoled, and then, seeing himself finally clearing up, how ridiculous he must be.

Subaru: "Ah really, I always end up crying it's so pathetic."

Naoko: “Crying isn’t a bad thing. Subaru, when you were born, you cried like crazy, you know. No matter who it is, when they first come out, they cry and cry it’s so embarrassing. Crying in all kinds of places, in all kinds of situations.”

Subaru: “———”

Naoko: “And after crying for a long, long time, if you’re smiling at the end, then everything is alright. What’s most important isn’t the beginning or the middle, it’s the end.”

Subaru: “In other words, if the results are good, then it’s all ok?”

Naoko: “That’s incorrect if you interpret it like that. Then, this will be your homework from mom.”

Though he would never get a chance to check the answers.

Handing out that homework assignment was another way of saying goodbye. Receiving it, Subaru stored it deep within his heart. Perhaps one day, when he finds the answer, he would just naturally come to understand it.

It wasn’t exactly a clean and gallant parting scene.

But his father and mother, after hearing that their ex-hikikomori son is going to disappear into some far and unknown place, did not reproach him, but rather sent him off with smiling faces.

Every bit of it, his past, his parents, his environment, he loved it all in its entirety.

Subaru: “—I’m going, then.”

Naoko: “En, alright.”

Giving his head a shake, at last, he forced his face into a smile.

Leaving his mother with that clumsy smile, Subaru turned his back and began to walk.

It would be the final stretch of the road to school. Following this branch of the road to the end, after going up a slope, he would find the school building waiting for him there, and—

Naoko: “Ah, right. Subaru, Subaru, I almost forgot.”

And, just as he got himself pumped up and ready to face what was to come, an air-headed voice came calling from behind. Almost stumbling over from the impact of that discouragement, Subaru turned around dejectedly.

Wondering what she was going to say at the very end, he saw his mother raising up her arm,

Naoko: “—Have a safe trip.”

Then, with a little wave of her hand, she said it with a smile.

—On the final night before he was summoned to the parallel world, when he set out for the convenience store, his mother had said this to him in the exact same way. But that time, Subaru only pushed open the door in a bad mood, without saying a thing.

Subaru: “——”

So, this would be the last chance, to erase his regret from that day—

Conversations-with-mother, advanced lesson— no matter how many times you get sidetracked, the correct answer somehow always emerges in the end.

The moment he remembered that, his strained cheeks softened, and turned into a genuine smile.

Subaru: “—Ok, I’m going now!”

High and crisp, Subaru’s voice rang out, across the road that led to school.

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An unpopulated school building. Heading from the entryway to the shoe closets, with some trouble, he opened the doors that seemed to not have been opened or closed in a very long time. Changing from his outdoor shoes to indoor ones, knocking his toes on the floor a few times to fit his feet inside, at last, with a sigh, Subaru stepped into the hallway.



Illustration from Volume 10, coloring by Setowi ([source](#))

Subaru was in the third-year, where, out of the eight home-classes, he was in the sixth. And in third-year class six, the student numbers were mixed between males and female students, and so Subaru's number was twenty-two. Being the oldest grade, all the third-year classrooms were on the first floor, just across the hallway, past the stairs.

In the dead-silent corridor, there were only the echoes of Subaru's own footsteps striking upon the linoleum floor as he made his way to his classroom.

It wasn't long before he reached it. Standing in front of the door, he took a deep breath.

Subaru: "——"

Placing his hand on the door, he slid it open.

In the moments that followed, there should be a crowd of reproachful eyes locking onto him, to admonish him for arriving so late to class, but—

???: "You came a lot earlier than I thought."

That was not the sight that greeted him.

On the other side of the opened doorway, he saw rows upon rows of empty desks, except only for the one seat in the center of the room.

Then, the person sitting there, turning her chair toward Subaru,

Echidna: "Welcome— In all that time spent facing your past, have you learned anything?"

Asked the Witch of Greed with her white hair swaying, her eyes brimming with curiosity.



Arc 4 Chapter 20 - Test Results

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 10, Chapter 5 “The First Step Forward”, Part 1

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Complete](#)

—Seated in the center of the classroom, the white-haired girl slightly tilted her head.

Receiving her gaze, Subaru quickly looked around the room to make sure there was no one else present. And then, sticking out half of his body into the hallway, he checked left and right just to be sure — Confirming once again that there was no one else, he scratched his head and let out a sigh.

Subaru: “There’s just something I have to say first.”

Echidna: “Sure, I’m listening. What you are feeling, what you are thinking, and what you want to say to me. I am very interested to hear all of it.”

Subaru: “You look super good in that uniform.”

Facing the Witch whose eyes were beaming with curiosity, Subaru stuck out a finger and blurted out his thoughts. And hearing this, the Witch seemed to blank out for a moment, until she couldn’t hold it in anymore and burst out laughing,

Echidna: “Wahahaha, why thank you. If you think so, then it was worth it for me to reconstruct this from your memories. In fact, this outfit seems to be the most vivid out of all your memories, and the one you’ve looked at the most. Is it a favorite of yours?”

Standing up from her seat, picking up the hems of her grey skirt — Echidna did a quick little spin on the spot. Her white, shoulder-length hair dancing with her movements, her playful figure looked perfectly like a youthful girl of her age.

Grey skirts, and a deep blue blazer. The red ribbon below her neck marked her as in the same year as Subaru, and in contrast underneath, her white dress-shirt shone bright and dazzling. Only, if there was one thing that he was dissatisfied with,

Subaru: “Compared to short skirts, I prefer long skirts a little better. That way it takes longer to lift them up and there’s more time to ignite one’s imaginations.”

Echidna: “I see. Then, to measure up to your skirt-lifting expectations, I will wear a longer skirt next time.”

Subaru: “We won’t get a chance for that! Also, it’s not because I like it that everyone wears this uniform. It’s just a rule here that we have to dress like this. Kind of like the Royal Knights and stuff.”

“Kukuku”, Echidna covered her lips and giggled. With an attitude as if she wasn’t really planning to take Subaru’s excuses seriously, even if he tried to exonerate himself, he won’t be getting the result he wanted.

Shrugging, Subaru walked to the back of the classroom — To the seat beside the window in the second-to-last row, and pulling out his chair in that half-assed location, he plonked himself down.

The tactile sensation of the hard, wooden chair. The edges of the desk that had alphabets carved into it by some previous occupant. The desk-leg that creaked whenever he put his weight on it while falling asleep. And the festering rust on the insides of the drawer. They were all fragments of Subaru’s distant, and bygone days.

Echidna: “And here I thought you’d be a little more surprised.”

Subaru: “If you wanted to hide it, you’ll have to put more effort into the background, you know. There wasn’t even a single person walking around on my way here, that’s just way too unrealistic.”

Even considering that it was a weekday afternoon, it may have just been a little too unpopulated along Subaru’s path. Almost as if everything irrelevant to Subaru’s past had simply been cut from this world.

Subaru: “This world was just way too convenient for me. So it’s your own damn fault that you didn’t get to see the reaction you wanted.”

Echidna: “No no no, that’s a part of the fun too. Experimenting, and receiving the results are in themselves a kind of happiness for me. What the results are at this point, doesn’t matter much. Unless, of course, if we are talking about how future events will be influenced by these results, then it would be a different matter.”

Echidna waved her hands left and right as she said this, as if she really wasn’t sour about the way things had veered outside her expectations. Seeing her without a trace of negative emotion, in his heart, Subaru secretly wanted to click his tongue.

Subaru: “So then, what is this world supposed to be? I’m sure I went in your Tomb while it was in the middle of the Trial, and then...”

Echidna: “You entered while possessing the qualifications. So naturally, you began the Trial as well, correct? Didn’t you hear it? «First, you must face your past.»”

Confirming Subaru’s thoughts with these words, Echidna placed her hands behind her back as she slowly walked toward Subaru. Her beautiful hair swaying in the cool, refreshing breeze that had blown into the classroom, without a sense of incongruity, the girl in her uniform blended seamlessly into her surroundings.

Her every casual gesture feeling like a trap set to entice his heart, Subaru consciously turned his gaze away from her. Then,

Echidna: “Anyone, would have regrets about the past. As long as they live day after day, no one is without regrets. Today they regret yesterday, yesterday they regret further before that, and when tomorrow comes, surely, you would regret something about today— People have the capacity to regret, after all.”

Subaru: “That’s a pretty pessimistic way of thinking about it. If we just replace «regret» with «self-reflection», then today we’d be reflecting on yesterday, and tomorrow we’d be reflecting on today, and, maybe, we might find some kind of breakthrough, isn’t that’s a human ability as well?”

Echidna: “—Precisely!”

Clapping her hands together with an insatiable voice, Echidna shoved her face up close, making Subaru instinctively shrink back. But, undeterred, she continued leaning in, staring into his eyes with her black pupils, at a distance where they could feel each other’s breaths,

Echidna: “It’s a simple play on words, or, rather, a slightly different way of thinking. But depending on whether you view the past with pessimism or optimism, the answers become worlds apart. Most people look to the past pessimistically and always only see the bad memories, and so they treat the path they have walked with denial. Then, growing even more repulsed by the sight of what they have denied, they close their hearts, and try to forget.”

Subaru: “Hey, your face... is kinda close...”

Echidna: “But can you blame them? Compared to today, your yesterday’s self was certainly more ignorant. And compared to what you will know tomorrow, your today’s self would no doubt be found lacking. The total sum of knowledge, or even just the number of memories, would always put the past at a disadvantage compared to the present and the future. That is simply the fact!”

Completely disregarding Subaru who was being pushed back by her aura, in a state of heated passion, Echidna pressed on her delivery. Suddenly turning her body away, she forcefully slammed her palms on the top of the desk,

Echidna: “And so, when people face their past, or when they actually meet their past, they become lost, confused, lamenting, suffering, anguishing, despairing, and there, they will find their answer. As long as they find their answer, no matter what kind of answer it is, I will give it my affirmation. Whether it was an answer they received by turning their backs, or by reaching their arms forward, it would be unmistakable proof that they have overcome their past.”

Subaru: “That’s, the purpose of this Trial?”

Echidna: “Correct. It is to face one’s past, and to come to some kind of answer about that past. If they are afraid of finding the answer, loathing it, or are hesitating and at their wit’s end, then the Trial could never be overcome. However, if they could either accept their past, or if they could deny it completely and sever themselves from it, then I would see them off with my praises. That, is the first of the Trials.”

Nodding to Subaru, who seemed to have understood, Echidna returned to her original self, and, with a slight blush on her cheeks, she quietly cleared her throat.

Echidna: “I, I seem to have gotten a little overexcited. I’m sorry I showed you something unsightly.”

Subaru: “No worries. If you had bad breath though, that would’ve gone badly, but fortunately, yours smelled like citrus. More importantly...”

Feeling a bit sentimental over the rare chance to see Echidna embarrassed, Subaru pulled up his chair and leaned his body forward, and,

Subaru: “If those points you mentioned are the conditions for passing the Trial, can I take that to mean I’ve passed the Trial?”

Echidna: “Having watched everything from beginning to end... I think the results were more than satisfactory.”

Placing her hand over her chest, Echidna inhaled deeply as if filling her lungs with the aroma of fragrant black-tea, and then, with a terribly satisfied look on her face,

Echidna: “Whether it was the symbol of the traumas of your past, or the representation of your past guilt, you have found your answers. For that, I send you off with my praises.”

Subaru: “From beginning to end... Doesn’t that mean you saw me crying with snot dripping down my nose too!?”

Echidna: “I’m sowwy, even I couldn’t help tearing up in the eyes at those parts.”

Subaru: “Shut up!! And don’t you tell anyone, it’s embarrassing!!”

The scene of his parting with his father where he poured out all his emotions, it wouldn’t be funny at all if some pervert had been watching them all that time. Above all, it would be an insult to the emotions between Subaru and Kenichi in that moment.

“Kukuku”, regardless of whether she could understand such sentiments, Echidna bursted out laughing,

Echidna: “If there was anything I was disappointed with, it would be that you hadn’t experienced the agony even deeper when you came face to face with your past.”

Subaru: “Huh?”

Echidna: “I like when people reach their answers, but I think the suffering on their path to the answers is something praiseworthy in itself. I was looking forward to watching you find an answer through the anguish and struggles, but...”

Casting a side-glance at Subaru, as if peering into the depths of his black irises, she narrowed her eyes,

Echidna: “Unfortunately, this Trial seems to have started a little too late for me to enjoy such a treat. It appears you have already found the answer to the negative feelings from your past before coming here.”

Subaru: “Aah... Is that so. If that’s the case, I really should offer my sympathies.”

Somewhat able to understand Echidna’s disappointment, Subaru exhaled a deep sigh through his nose.

If the Trial had gone the way she had hoped, Subaru would have returned to his parents, the source of his past trauma, and over the time spent with them, realized his own weakness, agonized over it, and reached an answer either by running away or facing it head on, and, at last, found the resolve to come here.

But Subaru had already...

Subaru: “Even when I was completely, hopelessly useless, there was a girl who told me I was a hero. So there was no need for me to face my past, I’ve already come to terms with the fact that I’m useless.”

Echidna: “So you’ve arrived at a different form of resignation, I see. But to have it stray so far from my expectations, it really is an utter disappointment. The next time you meet that person outside, tell her that a Witch had some complaints to say about her.”

Just as he was about to throw in a joke about that threatening remark, Subaru suddenly noticed. There was something Echidna said that he couldn’t let slide.

Subaru: “A while ago you said you formed this reconstruction from on my memories... If you can peek inside my head, then shouldn’t you know about the girl I spoke of?”

Or, perhaps rather than noticing it, it was him desperately clinging to a feeling that he could not let go of. Even if it meant having someone peek inside his head, if there was just someone who could remember

Rem after she had been forgotten by all the world, remember her lovely features, remember that this girl still existed... But,

Echidna: “Sorry to disappoint you. But even being a thing of Greed, I can distinguish between what is right and wrong. Though I have extracted the information I needed to conduct this Trial, I have not touched anything else. If I simply stole all the knowledge out of your head, then where would be the fun in that? I am not quite ready to abandon the pleasures of simply listening to others just yet.”

The only thing he got as a reply, was some kind of Witch’s sense of honor that was beyond his capacity to understand. One could even call them Echidna’s convictions. However shameless that logic may be, it was not something Subaru could argue with. Still,

Subaru: “If you only pulled out parts that were relevant to the Trial... Then why did you pull out that uniform...”

Echidna: “Obviously, I pulled it because it was a piece of information necessary for me to reconstruct this building you call «school». It definitely wasn’t because after discovering a new parallel world, I wondered what the girls here wore and whether it would maybe look nice on me or anything of that sort.”

Subaru: “Are you, one of those highly-intelligent idiots?”

After listening to Echidna essentially confessing the whole thing, Subaru sighed and shook his head.

So it was like that. It wasn’t the answer he had hoped to hear, but at least now he knew something for certain. Which was that,

Subaru: “There’s probably no need for me to ask this. But this world is...”

Echidna: “Aah, that’s right. This is a fabricated world created based on your memories, meant to be an extremely faithful reconstruction of reality. Which means, of course— Your real parents still have no idea where you are or what you are doing, and must be worrying to no end about their son, who had simply disappeared.”

Subaru: “———”

Echidna: “As for the information you didn’t know before, who knows if you hadn’t inadvertently brought them here... Are you so sure that you didn’t know about them? The letters from your parents’ old friend, can you be certain that you have never seen them? The old man who had known your father since he was a child, have you really never met him before? And have you truly never imagined an image of your father that was different from the one you knew, and never once traced it over inside your mind?”

Firing off her words in rapid succession, “Or rather,” Echidna continued,

Echidna: “Did you really think that as long you didn’t know what was hidden in your heart, they would simply stay hidden? The contents your true heart yearns to be freed, how could you be certain that they are safely sealed away, and would not leak through along with the rest of the mundane little details? And still, can you be sure that your self-serving desire to be loved, did not beg your fictional father and mother to behave the way they did?”

Putting her face up close against the silent Subaru’s, Echidna’s last words fell to a bewitching whisper, teasing at the strings of his heart. And then, at a distance close enough to feel each other’s breaths,

Echidna: “It was just too ideal, and too convenient— Don’t you think?”

Subaru: “———”

Tenderly gouging open Subaru’s heart with her soft fingertips, Echidna smiled sweetly.

Unlike a smile that would have suited a girl her age, this one was abominable, like one belonging to a Witch out of the folklores.

His mind toyed and tormented by her penetrating words, Subaru squeezed close his eyes. In the back of his closed eyelids, in that pitch-black world, emerged his last impressions of his parents—

Subaru: “Don’t belittle my parents just because you didn’t get what you wanted, Witch.”

Echidna: “...What?”

Subaru: “I’ve already told them all of my answers. And my mom and dad both received it. I’ve told them everything that I was never able to say, and they told me to give it my best, and then wished me a safe journey.”

Standing up from his chair, placing his hands on the desk, he pressed back his face against Echidna's so that their foreheads touched. Watching the Witch's black eyes opening wide in surprise, Subaru,

Subaru: "Their voices, their smiles, everything from those moments shattered my imaginations— My parents, are not some empty casks that can be filled with my fantasies. Don't you underestimate them."

Echidna: "———"

Subaru: "I've already told them everything I wanted to say. And after having put everything to rest, I came here— Nothing you say can trick me."

Pulling back his forehead from hers, Subaru sat down in his chair once more. Then, leaning backwards into his chair, he rudely crossed his legs and stared at Echidna with an insolent gaze.

For a moment, Echidna seemed astounded by Subaru's reaction,

Echidna: "Really... You wouldn't even let me see you questioning your answers for a minute, you really are a human who would make a Witch cry. How exceptional indeed."

Subaru: "I'm gonna blush if you praise me like that. I'm the kind of guy who grows when he gets praised, you know. I can feel myself getting taller as we speak!"

Echidna: "I see you're never at a loss for words... Aah, but it's good enough. It's more than good enough. It's a delightful thing, to see such a firm answer that would not allow itself to be shaken."

As if giving up, Echidna shook her head with a smile, and then, pulling out the chair in front of Subaru, she sat down facing him,

Echidna: "The Trial is now over, in its truest sense. You have escaped the evil clutches of a Witch, it seems. As a reward... Is there anything you wish to ask me before you go back?"

Subaru: "Oh, then there is one thing."

Echidna: "Hm, let's hear it."

Echidna nodded, as Subaru stuck out a finger pointing directly at her,

Subaru: “Before, you said you had nothing to do the Trial... How is this nothing to do with it!? You’re not just involved, you’re pretty much the main culprit. What’s with that blatant straight-faced lie about having no influence over the Trial!”

Echidna: “To take a Witch at her word... Even naivety and gullibility should have a limit. Didn’t I tell you the last time we parted? I am a wicked Witch, after all.”

Subaru: “Aah, is that right. Then, I can’t trust a single word from this wicked Witch, can I. In that case I have nothing else to ask... By the way, is the seal on the Sanctuary removed now?”

Echidna: “And here you are asking another question as if nothing happened... You really don’t bother putting up appearances, do you? Unfortunately, it would be too simple if the Trials ended with this. There are a total three parts to the Trials⁶⁹. But since you already passed the First Trial, I don’t think they would be too difficult for you.”

Sidestepping Subaru’s indignation, Echidna held out three fingers as she answered him. Receiving this, Subaru muttered “Three parts...” under his breath,

Subaru: “One way or another, I’ll have to unseal the Sanctuary. So, once I clear the other two Trials, it will be released, right? Can I take that as a guarantee?”

Echidna: “That’s why I gave you the Qualifications. So of course. If you or any qualified half-blood overcomes the Trials, the Sanctuary will be liberated with my blessings. How will you overcome the next two Trials, I wonder? I will happily look forward to the answers you will give.”

Watching Echidna nodding in affirmation, Subaru responded “Is that so”, and stood up.

There was nothing else he wanted to ask. So there was nothing more to gain by dawdling in this fabricated world. A certain nostalgic feeling made him almost want to stay, but he had already said all his reluctant goodbyes. Even if, as the Witch said, they were only transient and fleeting things.

Subaru: “Hey, Echidna.”

⁶⁹ This may be confusing as “Trial”, singular, has been used so far. This is because the original Japanese makes no distinction between singular and plural, and as such the kanji is the same no matter what (試練).

Echidna: “What is it? Perhaps you would like to punch me before you go? Well, I realize I would deserve it, considering my conduct towards you. So if you wish, I am willing to accept it without complaints. But still, I am only a young girl, after all. If you could please avoid the face if possible...”

Subaru: “Thank you.”

Echidna: “———”

Speechless, after going on and on trying to vindicate herself, Echidna suddenly lost her words. Seeing her like this, for the first time, Subaru felt a small sense of gratification,

Subaru: “Even if it didn’t really happen, and my words didn’t really reach those two, I was able to say the things I wanted to say thanks to you. Even if it was because of your crappy-gossip-deprived curiosity, I was able to see the people I thought I would never see again, and say my goodbyes.”

And show them that their hopeless, small, disappointing son had become a little less hopeless, had grown a little more, and could now hold his head a little higher.

Subaru: “For that, I am grateful. So, thank you.”

Echidna: “...You’re a human I can’t understand at all, it’s very fascinating. It’s almost frightening, in fact.”

Echidna wasn’t joking or lying, and the look in her eyes seemed as if she was genuinely threatened by him. Seeing her like this, Subaru lifted the corners of his lips and smiled in reply,

Subaru: “Witch-sama must get frightened easily if she could be caught by a little kid like me. Oh well. So uh, where’s the exit?”

Echidna: “Leaving won’t be difficult. Even now, this world is already beginning to fade. Nothing outside of this building is solid anymore— Leaving this building should return you directly to the insides of the Tomb.”

Subaru: “That’s pretty convenient— In that case, see you next Trial, I guess.”

With a wave of his hand, Subaru got up from his seat and headed out of the classroom. Sensing Echidna’s gaze trailing behind him, Subaru walked out without looking back.

In the world outside the window, dissolving into the encroaching vast, blue sky, the scenes in the distance began to fade. The fabricated world which had fulfilled its purpose, was vanishing into nothing.

The father who had patted on Subaru's back, and the mother who had walked with Subaru to send him off, were both fading along with the disappearance of this world. Until they were nowhere to be found.

Subaru: "...You guys have already taught me all the most important things."

His emotions swelling up in his chest, feeling the back of his eyes growing hot, Subaru roughly wiped his eyes with his sleeves just once. And after that, lifting up his head, there was no longer any trace of tears in his eyes.

Looking straight ahead, Subaru walked toward the exit of this dying world.

In front of him, the world gradually turned to white, as far as his eyes can see, and---

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Echidna: "—Already gone, I see. My my, he's a lot more formidable than I thought."

—In the classroom after Subaru had left, among the rows upon rows of empty desks, Echidna, having been left behind, stuck a hand into the front of her hair, and, enjoying a moment of quiet to herself, she leaned her weight onto the desk behind her.

Little by little, the world had begun to collapse.

The fleeting world reconstructed out of memories, with the loss of its source, was turning back to dust. With the sensation of the disintegration of the world upon her skin, Echidna did not pay any mind to the crumbling footings or the vanishing atmosphere around her.

Her attention was fixed on a single point — in front of the blackboard, toward the teacher's podium. There,

Echidna: "Just what I should expect from the man you fell for, I suppose."

As if struck by a devastating impact, the upper half of the shadow flew backwards.

Beaten back by the power of the strike, the rest of shadow sank into the darkness it had created. Lightly shaking its head at this outcome, the shadow reached out its right arm toward Sekhmet.

Immediately after, the darkness that had engulfed half of the classroom attacked at once, as dark demonic claws shot out, covering over everything in sight. The impenetrable blackness sealed off every direction — But,

Sekhmet: “Didn’t I just say it’s useless, huuuu.”

The maelstrom of black claws scattered in the blink of an eye, and without the least resistance or reserve, the counter-attack struck into the shadow’s entire body. While the shock of impact after impact were nailing the shadow’s flesh into the cracks of the wall, Sekhmet only remained crouched up on the floor without the slightest movement, lazily looking on.

But even so, Sekhmet’s attacks continued to assail the shadow’s entire body, until gradually, that bottomless form began to break apart. Against the deafening sound of the impacts, and the sight of the writhing shadow, Sekhmet only scratched at her hair as she watched,

Sekhmet: “With most of your power sealed away, haaa. And being inside nasty Echidna’s citadel, huu. In a state that deprives you of your full potential, haaa, you’re no match against me, huu.”

Trying to hold back a yawn, Sekhmet’s attacks ceased, and the defeated shadow dropped to its knees—when a strike from above mercilessly nailed it into the floor.

Sinking into the pitch-black darkness, the fading Envy looked up at Sekhmet.

???: “Why do you why do you why do you why do you why do you why do you why do you stand in between in between in between in between in between in between in between me me me me me and him and him and him and him and him and him—?”

Sekhmet: “Haaaa— It’d be too much of a bother to explain.”

With this bitter reply, Sekhmet made a little downward swing with her raised hand.

In that same instant, half of the school building collapsed, and along with the crumbling dirt and lumps of earth, the shadow of Envy was swallowed into the depths of the ground.

In a world that was already fading, there would be no way to return from there.

Sekhmet: “Even after I’m dead, huuu. Why do I still have to deal with this stuff, haaaa.”

Her own actions having sped up the collapse of this world, the Witch of Sloth found a relatively nicer spot in the corner of the decaying classroom, and nudged herself over on her butt.

Huddling up with her back against the wall, feeling herself being drawn into the void of the dying world that had finished serving its purpose, she looked out through a shattered window at the Sun.

Sekhmet: “Nothing ever goes the way you want it to, huuu. Whether you’re a Witch— Or the one ensnared by a Witch, haaaa.”

With a final, languorous sigh, the world vanished into light.

Arc 4 Chapter 21 - Renewed Resolve

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 10, Chapter 5 “The First Step Forward”, Parts 2 and 5

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#)

When he opened his eyes, the first thing Subaru felt was that something dusty had gotten into his mouth.

Mingling with the saliva that had accumulated in his mouth, he unconsciously touched it with the tip of his tongue — Tasting the flavor of soil and gravel, he spat it out as quickly as he could. And then, jumping up,

Subaru: “Ueggh! Pftephtoo! Weird little pebbles got in my mouth... Uuuueeeeghh.”

Spitting while dusting himself off, Subaru turned his head all around, straining his eyes trying to see in the darkness.

The space that had lost its source of light was filled with frigid air — There, he remembered he was inside a Tomb which tested those who entered. And at the same time,

Subaru: “Right, I took the Trial...”

After he dashed into the Tomb, he lost consciousness and was brought into a dream world. In the past known as the First Trial — Although he wasn’t sure if “past” would be the right word, Subaru faced his immutable origins, and said his final farewells to those he left behind, and, at last, finding out that all of it had been orchestrated by a Witch’s hands, he was brought back here.

One by one, recalling all that had happened after he lost consciousness, Subaru confirmed that his memories were clear. To his parents inside the dream, whom he will never meet again, he had said all his apologies, his thanks, and his goodbyes.

And, in place of his tremendous nostalgia and sorrow, they had granted him courage and resolve.

Subaru: “Don’t worry. I didn’t forget. I still remember everything we said to each other.”

He had worried that, in the worst case, his memories might have been damaged from having his mind forcefully inspected, so it was fortunate that he still remembered everything.

Having finished checking his own body, the next thing that came to Subaru’s mind was,

Subaru: “Right...! The reason I came in here was, —Emilia!”

Scolding himself for being so slow to come to his senses, Subaru turned back into the room — and found Emilia lying sideways on the floor, the same way as he had been.

Rushing over, her white skin and silver hair shone even more prominently in the darkness, sensing that she was still breathing, he was washed with a wave of relief. But, it was only until he saw her expression.

Emilia: “... H... Ah, no... Stop...”

Subaru: “———”

Emilia’s face was twisted in agony, and sweat was emerging on her forehead.

But no matter how painful her expression had become, her body couldn’t seem to move. Her limbs remained rigid as if frozen still, and only her face revealed the colors of her suffering.

If she was going through the same type of Trial as Subaru, then,

Subaru: “It must be a past you don’t want to see... Or no, it should be a past that you need to resolve, no matter what...?”

He didn’t know how much time had passed, but Emilia had entered the Tomb thirty minutes before he did. Yet even so, Subaru returned before her, which meant he could only imagine how difficult her Trial must be.

True to the literal sense of the phrase, her expression was groaning in pain. Originally, he thought he should have faith in her, and wait for her to return safely from the Trial, but——

Subaru: “Looking at this expression, what kind of guy could say something pretty like that.”

Watching the side of Emilia's face that looked like she was about to cry, Subaru extended out a finger, hoping to ease even a small fraction of her pain. But, the moment his finger touched her cheek,

Emilia: "———!"

Emilia's previously frozen limbs began to spasm out of control. Seeing her face that was contorted by pain turning stiff, Subaru hurriedly held out his arm to support her head, and embraced the trembling Emilia tightly into his chest, without letting go.

Subaru: "Emilia!? Hey, hold on... Emilia!"

Rubbing her back as he held her close, he desperately called the trembling Emilia's name. The sight of her severe convulsions made his heart shrivel with horror, but, gradually, her trembling body calmed,

Emilia: "—Huu, —baru?"

Subaru: "—! Ah, aahah, yeah. Are you alright? You remember me, right? I'm the person you entrusted your future life to, Natsuki Subaru."

Emilia: "I don't, remember going that far..."

Giving her memory a jolt as she woke up, Subaru confirmed that she was conscious and that her memories weren't muddled. As he let go of her body, Emilia's violet eyes slowly focused onto him.

Emilia: "Um... Huh? Why, am I..."

Subaru: "Take it slow, Emilia-tan. Just put the little confusing things in the back of your mind for now and take a deep breath. Then move your arms and legs a bit, see if they're numb, and try to stand up if you think you can stand."

Emilia: "Ah, hmm, alright..."

Sensing the worry in his words as she woke, Emilia took a large deep breath as Subaru said. Then, moving her arms from her fingertips to her shoulders, she stood up with the help of Subaru's hand, and curiously looked around in the darkness,

Emilia: "In a dark place... Alone with Subaru and..."

Subaru: “When you say it like that, it does kind of sound like a tantalizing situation, although the crap location’s totally killing the mood here.”

Seeing Emilia rushing to grasp the situation, Subaru scratched his face with a wry smile. In any case, the fact that it was the Tomb of a Witch pretty much ruined the mood for any lovers planning to sneak in.

But, hearing Subaru’s words, Emilia suddenly hugged her own shoulders. Seeing this reaction, Subaru shuddered to himself “Crap I might’ve overdone it...!”

Emilia: “That’s, right... I took the Trial, and then...”

Subaru: “Oh, aah, that’s right. This is inside the Witch’s Tomb. I mean, I was worried to death there. A bit after Emilia-tan went in, the lights in the Tomb suddenly went out. So I panicked and ran in after you but...”

Emilia: “a... But... No, that, I, didn’t... I didn’t mean to, I didn’t...”

Subaru: “Emilia?”

There didn’t seem to be anything wrong with her body — but just as Subaru wanted to continue, he noticed that Emilia’s voice was trembling, and her attitude was strange.

Hugging her own shoulders as if she was cold, her teeth were clattering as she faintly shook her head.

Emilia: “I... I didn’t... It’s not like that... th-that kind of... I didn’t... I really didn’t... I told you it’s not like that... It’s.”

Subaru: “Emilia. Wait, Emilia? Calm down, what...”

Emilia: “...Don’t... at me... with that kind of eyes... Don’t, don’t don’t... Don’t it’s not like that... Why are... Leaving me all alone... Please no...”

Without hearing Subaru’s calls, Emilia covered her palms over her face and fell to the ground. Her voice carried tears, and her trembling sobs, clear as silver chimes, would drown its listeners in heartache and sorrow.



Illustration from Volume 10, coloring by Norvak ([source](#))

The sight of her collapsed upon the floor stunned Subaru into silence, unable to utter a single word. Except,

Subaru: “It’s alright. It’s alright. I’m here. I’m here with you. I won’t leave you alone.”

Only, comforting the trembling, crying girl, protecting her, cherishing her, holding her entire body in his embrace, he kept on gently caressing her back.

All the while, as if not hearing Subaru’s voice at all, Emilia hid her face behind her palms.

Emilia: “...help, daddy. Help, me... Puck, Puck... Pu... ck...”

The name she kept on calling was not the boy at her side worrying over her, but the name of the Spirit who refused to show his face even while she was breaking down in tears.

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Ram: “—She’s settled down and is resting now.”

Seeing Subaru looking at her with an inquisitive gaze as she came out of the room, Ram returned a gaze as if looking at a poorly trained dog, and said this. Without even a comment about her demeaning gaze, Subaru quietly replied “Is that so”. Seeing him this way, Ram let out a small sigh,

Ram: “That face isn’t like you, Barusu. Your face is usually sloppy to begin with, but if you cast that shadow on it, it will become even less tolerable to look at.”

Subaru: “Sloppy or whatever is none of your business... But, I’m sorry I got you worried.”

Ram: “...You’re just a Barusu, when did you start getting so good at noticing other people’s worries?”

Seeing Ram look as if she was genuinely surprised, Subaru stuck out his tongue and withheld his earlier gratitude for now. He had said the first half of that with his eyes squeezed shut just to blast back at Ram, but the second half had been his true feelings.

Taking his eyes off of Ram, Subaru looked behind her — at the door to the room Ram had just come out of. Beyond it, right now, Emilia must be sleeping.

Subaru: “Still, sorry this happened two days in a row, Ryuzu-san. It must have caused you trouble too.”

Ryuzu: “There’s no need to worry about causing me trouble. It was because of our selfish wish that she had to take the Trial in the first place.”

Turning his head around, Ryuzu’s even voice answered Subaru from behind.

Outside the bedroom, the room they were currently in could be considered a living room of sorts. Other than these two rooms, there was only another room for the library, and the three together made up Ryuzu’s home.

Subaru couldn’t help but feel that it was an awfully modest life for someone who was practically the village chief of the Sanctuary. But then again, looking at the little girl sipping on tea in the corner of the room, it was probably more than enough space for her to live in. Anyways,

Garfiel: “Hah, look at’ya, Granny, lookin’ out for ‘em. Honestly for me, all feels like «Th’presumptuous Gounzun got no place t’live».”

Subaru: “I still have absolutely no idea what feeling you’re talking about... But, at least the fact that it isn’t good got across.”

Seated across from Ryuzu, also gulping down tea from a teacup, Garfiel bared his teeth as he said this. It was another incomprehensible idiom — but judging from the current situation, Subaru guessed it was probably something about disappointment. And, picking up the intention behind Garfiel’s words,

Subaru: “Just so you know, if you’re planning to badmouth Emilia, you’ll have to make an appointment through me first. And only if I approve it, as her manager and all.”

Garfiel: “I ain’t interested in badmouthin’ people behind their backs. Not th’kinda prick who’d do that. If I got somethin I wanna say, I say it to their face. Or I’d just use my fists, yeah?”

Waving his other hand that wasn't holding the teacup, Garfiel brushed off Subaru's provocation with a vicious-looking smile. That attitude didn't reduce Subaru's tension in the slightest, and it was at this point when the person who had stayed silent up to now — Otto, raised his hand with a "So um..."

Otto: "In that case, can I just ask what exactly happened? I honestly don't want to get involved too much, but I would really prefer if things don't go down this perilous direction, so I think I better act as an arbiter to help move things along."

Subaru: "Oh right, my bad. In fact, you're perfect for the job. After all, you don't have any deep relationships with anyone present, you barely have anything to do with what's going on here and you're pretty much a minor comic relief character who isn't carrying out any responsibilities in particular at the moment. I'll let you take it from here."

Otto: "What's with that rock-pulverizing review!? Is that something you're supposed to say when you're letting someone else take over!?"

As Otto started shrieking at Subaru's description, Subaru held a finger to his lips in a gesture to say "Not too loud". Seeing this, Otto hurriedly closed his mouth. Still not quite settled down, he shook his head,

Otto: "Aaaah, even though I'm still not ok with that, let's move on for now. First thing I want to ask you, Natsuki-san, is what happened after you went in the Tomb?"

Subaru: "Even if you ask me what happened..."

Starting off like this, Subaru brought a hand to his chin and looked up at the ceiling.

In his mind, he went over all the things that had happened inside the Tomb — The Trial, and the strange way Emilia had behaved afterward: the sight of her inconsolable crying, apologizing, as if muttering in her sleep, and calling the name of that Spirit.

Subaru: "The Trial was definitely going on inside the Tomb. After chasing Emilia into that place, the same thing happened to me. Basically, I got through the Trial without any problems, but Emilia seems to have encountered some difficulties. It looked like she was in too much pain, so I called out to her... and after she woke up and regained consciousness, she became like this."

Otto: "Nonononononononono, wait a minute."

Flapping his hands up and down to stop Subaru's rapid-fire answer, Otto stared at him with a baffled expression. Subaru stared back at him with a face that seemed to say "What?", when Otto started going "Nononono" again,

Otto: "I almost kept nodding when you just casually glossed over the part that totally needed an explanation... Natsuki-san, you took the Trial as well?"

Subaru: "Ah, uh-huh, yeah, I took it. A friend signed me up, what can I do."

Otto: "But, Natsuki-san couldn't possibly have any friends, please take this more seriously."

Subaru: "There are some things that are totally not ok to say to people!"

Subaru started staring daggers at Otto as a declaration of war when an arm suddenly came in between them. Moving the two apart, Ram looked up at Subaru,

Ram: "Then, Barusu, you have passed the Trial. Is that correct?"

Subaru: "Ah, yeah. That's right. I got forcibly dragged in when I went inside. It wasn't really on a level where I could say no."

Ram: "How you started it is irrelevant. The more important question is... Did Barusu already pass the Trial."

Ram placed a finger to her lips and closed her eyes in thought. Then, looking toward Ryuzu,

Ram: "That's what our household's scullery boy said, do you sense any changes? If the Trial really is over, the seal on the Sanctuary should be lifted."

Ryuzu: "...No, my body didn't feel anything in particular. If we actually try going outside the Sanctuary, though, that might be a different story.

Ram: "Is that so. Then it should be simple. Would you please come with Ram, we could check if it's alright to leave the Sanctuary. If we can, then..."

Subaru: "Oyoyoy, don't get carried away. You're jumping to conclusions here. Yeah, I didn't explain it well enough, but that kind of split-second decisions is just overdoing it here."

Just as Ram was about to pull Ryuzu away, Subaru quickly caught her by the shoulder, saying this. The pink haired girl's brows creased with displeasure as she turned around, and with "What is it?", she immediately recovered her expression.

Ram: "If you have successfully brought an end to the Trial, we must check whether the residents have been liberated in accordance with the Covenant. If Barusu's words are true, by tomorrow, the villagers of Arlam would be able to return to the village, and Roswaal-sama's wounds could be better addressed inside the Mansion..."

Subaru: "After your true motivation slipped out at the end there, I can see why you're so eager to get going... Sorry I got your hopes up, but we can't leave the Sanctuary yet. The Trial still hasn't completely ended."

After being told this, Ram's eyes opened just slightly wider. Then she looked away, thinking over the meaning of Subaru's words, and as if having arrived at the only possible conclusion, she nodded,

Ram: "You lied to me, prepare to die."

Subaru: "That conclusion and sentencing was way too fast!!"

Immediately pulling out a small wand, Ram was ready to perform summary execution. Holding up both his hands to surrender, Subaru frantically shook his head,

Subaru: "Besides I wasn't lying! I did pass the First Trial! But there are still two more Trials left! There are three Trials in total, so unfortunately Ryuzu-san and everyone else are still not released yet."

Ram: "Even this kind of irresponsible remark should have a limit... Just how do you know this?"

Subaru: "Because, I heard it from the one who came up with the Trials, the—"

"Witch", was the word Subaru was about to say when he felt a chill running through his entire body.

Petrified, his limbs felt heavy as if they had been burdened with lead, his thoughts dulled as if his brain was being drowned in mud, and his arteries froze as if they had been injected with ice.

All the while, within Subaru's mind, there was nothing but an idiotic blank void.

The contents of the Trial, and the fact that two more Trials were awaiting him — he knew that someone had told him. That it was a Witch. But,

Subaru: “What was that person like, I can’t remember at all...”

Pressing his temples, Subaru couldn’t believe the gap in his memory.

He could remember all of the conversations with his parents, the heat of his tears, and the warmth of every word he had left behind on their parting. But his memories of the Witch who tied all these other memories together were abruptly missing like a gaping hole.

Seeing Subaru closing his mouth and standing there dumbstruck, Ram, who was just about ready to dish out destruction, got out of her battle stance. Putting the wand she had pulled out back onto her hip, she shot a glance at the silenced Subaru, and sighed. And, watching her from the side,

Garfiel: “Aeh? Just when things were gettin’ interestin, ain’t ya gonna keep goin? After so long, was just thinkin when I’d get to see Ram violent again.”

Ram: “As if the graceful and gentle Ram could possibly do such brutish things. Besides, I more or less understood based on Barusu’s attitude just now, so there’s no need for that.”

Subaru: “Understood... what?”

Lightly brushing off Garfiel’s joke, Ram didn’t seem to pay him any mind. But, hearing Subaru’s question, Ram slightly tilted her head.

Ram: “That Barusu wasn’t lying, that’s all. If we can accept your words as credible, then that’s good enough for now. Barusu, go on answering Otto’s questions.”

Subaru: “Ah, aah... Alright but.”

It was still a bit hard to wrap his head around it, but in front of Ram’s forceful attitude, Subaru could only nod his head. And Otto, who had been watching their exchange, lightly cleared his throat with an “In that case”,

Otto: “Even though we got derailed for a bit, let’s get back on topic. The details of the Trials could be set aside for now... Do you have any idea what could’ve made Emilia-sama so distraught?”

Subaru: "...I do. It's probably to do with the content of the Trial. Even though the details of the Trial I took, and the one Emilia took are different, I think the main theme is same."

Otto: "The contents... Um, would it be alright to ask about those?"

Otto seemed concerned, but Subaru held up a palm gesturing that it's fine. Seeing Ram and Garfiel turning their eyes towards him as well, Subaru nodded,

Subaru: "The First Trial is to face your past. Basically, it's to come face to face with your past attachments and regrets, and come to some sort of resolution."

Otto: "I—I see... and that's why the details would be different."

Obviously, everyone had a different past.

So, depending on the person, this Trial could be difficult or simple. Subaru just happened to hit the mark, whereas Emilia had taken a critical setback—

Subaru: "No, if we take the Qualifications into account, then the contents of the Trials are obviously just plain malicious."

After all, Subaru's Qualification was specially granted, while half-bloods were born with them. Even though he didn't know the true purpose of the Trials, the stories behind those of half-blood would have been determined by the various conditions and restraints attached to their birth.

They would have been persecuted by other races as well as their own, been terrorized and shunned, and if the ones who would have had to endure such conditions were selected to take the Trials, then, of course, the Tomb would easily find their most painful pasts to test them.

Subaru: "To gather a bunch of guys here who would certainly have trouble passing the Trials. That really is black-hearted."

Otto: "Right now, even if we keep calling the examiner names for being mean, we won't really get anywhere. More importantly... it will be hard to bring it up to her, the reason why Emilia-sama is so distraught, that is."

Otto mumbled as he turned his eyes toward the bedroom where Emilia was sleeping. Watching him, everyone more or less understood what he was trying to say, and, deep down, Subaru appreciated Otto's unspoken consideration.

—Emilia's appearance resembled the description of the Witch of Envy in so many ways, on top of being a half-elf. From that alone one should be able to infer some sense of the baseless scorn and persecution she must have endured. And naturally, having never actually been in her position, what Subaru and the others were able to imagine could only be barely scratching the surface.

And that is why they could not bring up this topic lightly. One could say that Otto's judgment was awfully humane, or, on the other hand, that his personality was fatally unsuited for a merchant.

Subaru: "Even though you can never, ever, become a great merchant, you have my gratitude."

Otto: "Why are you just shattering my dreams all of a sudden!?"

Subaru: "I'm usually too embarrassed to straight-up express my gratitude without spiking it with a joke, try to understand."

Otto: "How about you try to understand how deeply my heart just got wounded!!"

With Otto blasting that out while stomping on the floor, everyone else in the room put their fingers up to their lips gesturing "Not too loud!". Seeing this, Otto hurriedly blocked his own mouth, but it was too late.

At first, there was a just small sound.

In the house that fell completely silent after Otto shut himself up, the sound of small steps striking upon the floor grew louder, and louder. Everyone turned their gazes toward the direction of the sound — toward the direction of the bedroom.

And before anyone could open their mouths, the door opened, and,

Emilia: "Um... I'm sorry I caused you guys trouble."

Saying that quiet apology, Emilia, with her silver hair flowing down her back, emerged out of the room.

Everyone breathed a sigh of relief when they saw that there was no longer any trace of distress in her words. And Subaru quickly jogged over to her side,

Subaru: “Thank god, good morning, Emilia-tan. Are you feeling better now?”

Emilia: “Ah. Erm, I’m fine. My body feels completely fine now. Sorry I made you worry.”

Subaru: “I see, that’s good. You know, since I wasn’t with you when you fell down, I was really worried if maybe you bumped into something. So you see, the only way we won’t have to worry about each other is if I never leave your side.”

Emilia: “—Yeah, I guess you’re right.”

Subaru: “Yeah?”

Already preparing his posture for some kind of comeback to his joke, Subaru slightly furrowed his brows at Emilia’s unexpected reply. Her eyes were lowered, and were staring at Subaru’s hand. Wondering what it might be, Subaru tilted his head, and held his hand out to her.

Subaru: “What is it? Maybe you suddenly miss the feeling of my palm? If that’s the case, I can hold your hand all night long if you want.”

Emilia: “Eh, ah... I-I’m alright. That’s not it. I’m just kind of, still half-asleep.”

Just before touching Subaru’s outstretched palm, as if suddenly remembering something, Emilia shook her head. And as her last word fell, the girl in maid’s uniform walked over,

Ram: “Emilia-sama. More than anything, it’s wonderful that you’ve woken up safely. If possible, please don’t overexert yourself, and tell me how you’re really feeling.”

Subaru: “Oy. You’re making it sound as if Emilia’s hesitating to tell me the truth or something.”

Ram: “In front of someone who isn’t a fellow woman, or should I say a guy who’s always trying to show off, there are certain things that one might find hard to say. Please show enough consideration to notice that and get out of the room.”

Subaru: “I wish I could show that kind of consideration but...”

While Ram was giving him a sharp glare, Subaru's words suddenly trailed off as he dropped down his eyes. Ram furrowed her brows at this, but soon seemed to understand when she followed Subaru's gaze downward...

...to see the tips of Emilia's white fingers – timidly wrapping onto Subaru's hand, dangling at his side.

Emilia: "Eh, ah!"

Late to notice Subaru and Ram's meaningful gazes, Emilia quickly let go of his hand. Her cheeks blushing bright red as if everything she did just now had been unconscious, she started panicking,

Emilia: "N-not like that. That was really weird, ok? I, really didn't mean to do that... because, I already decided I wouldn't, you know."

Subaru: "Yeah you did draw it back at first, and then grabbed my hand anyway. I liked it so I won't complain, but, are you really alright, Emilia-tan?"

Asking this question with still some lingering yearning for the fingertips that had been pulled away, he saw Emilia firmly nodding her head up and down. Her cheeks were still blushing red, but even Subaru could sense that it was no longer due to embarrassment.

However, Emilia didn't seem to notice that there was anything strange about her,

Emilia: "I'm sorry I interrupted your conversations. But, I really don't feel like there's anything wrong with my body. I was a bit half-asleep before, but I'm fully awake now and fit as a fiddle."

Subaru: "It's been a long time since I heard someone say «fit as a fiddle»."

Emilia: "Hmph, Subaru's always like that."

After their old back and forth, as always, Emilia puffed up her cheeks pouting. Seeing her behave just the same as usual, Subaru wondered if he was simply thinking too much into it, and put aside his worries for the time being. But,

Ram: "Emilia-sama. Sorry to bring this up so soon after you have woken up, but, about the Trial..."

Emilia: "—Ah."

Even though Emilia seemed to have recovered sooner than anyone expected, the moment Ram mentioned the Trial, Emilia's face tensed up. Subaru, who was watching her intently, noticed this momentary change, but by the next instant, she had already hidden it behind a smile.

Emilia: "So...um, everyone already knows about the Trial's contents?"

Ram: "We heard it from Barusu. Of course, we didn't get into any details. Emilia-sama, we realize there must be things you would rather not be asked about."

Emilia: "I—I see, Subaru... Eh? How could Subaru...? I mean, Subaru isn't half-blooded, how could he take the Trial..."

Surprised, Emilia looked toward Subaru, and, as if with the same question, everyone else fixed their eyes onto Subaru as well. It was only natural they would ask this, and receiving their gazes, Subaru thought for a moment about how he should answer,

Subaru: "I told you before I went in. I got the Qualifications. Who it came from is a bit hard to explain, but I could tell you where... It was, probably when I went into the Tomb the evening before."

Garfiel: "By evening, y'mean when you suddenly went fainted and I had to drag you all th'way here?"

Subaru: "Yeah, that's right. I'm not sure exactly how or why I got it... But that should've been it. Maybe when a guy without Qualifications walks in, he gets baptized or something, and afterwards he'll be allowed to go in. Wouldn't it be a surprise if Roswaal could go in too?"

Garfiel: "Let's send Roswaal in t'check, it'll be hilarious watchin' him bouncin out. Be just like checkin' if «Purinpas' blood drips the same shade o'red»."

Garfiel opened his mouth laughing, but as soon as he saw Ram's cold stare, he made a "you're no fun" face and closed his mouth. And then, although Ram still didn't seem convinced by Subaru's answer,

Ram: "In any case, it's a fact that Barusu went in and brought Emilia-sama out, and during that time, took the same kind of Trial as Emilia-sama did, and, if his words weren't entirely delusional, managed to pass it."

Subaru: "Delusional... That hurts, oy."

Emilia: “Managed to pass it... Subaru, passed the Trial?”

While Subaru was complaining about Ram’s merciless word choice, Emilia’s ears didn’t seem to catch the rest of that interaction. With flickering eyes, she looked at Subaru, and,

Emilia: “You really passed it, Subaru? The... past?”

Subaru: “The one I saw would’ve been different from Emilia-tan’s. Besides I... couldn’t have done it on my own.”

His mother and father, who should have been the obstacles in his path, instead gave him the greatest encouragement in the end. And, more importantly, even before challenging the Trial, Subaru’s heart already had the answers.

Although it was unfair to Emilia, they had gone into their Trials with very different conditions.

Subaru: “I just lucked out and got a nice test result, that’s all. I’m more concerned about Emilia-tan, though. From the looks of it, I guess your Trial didn’t go too well...”

Emilia: “E-en. That’s right... I tried my best, but it suddenly broke off half-way through.”

Subaru: “That was probably because I woke you up, I think, sorry... But then, is re-taking the Trials even possible? Instead of continuing to the other two Trials, I just got sent back here.”

Listening to Emilia’s faltering words, Subaru turned to Ryuzu and asked this question. Sitting there quietly in the corner, the old hag who looked like a little girl touched a hand to her cheek.

Ryuzu: “There weren’t many precedents but... you should be able to challenge multiple times. I myself did not pass beyond the First Trial, but I challenged twice. What bothers me the most, though, is Su-bo, who received the Qualifications.”

Subaru: “Me?”

Ryuzu: “Suddenly becoming qualified out of the blue should not be possible. At least, as far as I know, having been here since the time when the Tomb was first created... it shouldn’t be. But I might have a rough idea.”

After that, Ryuzu fell silent. Even though he felt something was off about Ryuzu's words and demeanor, Subaru kept it to himself for the moment, and turned to Emilia,

Subaru: "Either way, it's officially confirmed that it's possible to re-take the Trials. So now, it's just a question of Emilia-tan."

Emilia: "M-me?"

Subaru: "Yeah, that's right. I just have to ask— Emilia-tan, do you still have the resolve to challenge the Trials again?"

Emilia: "———Ah."

At that question, Emilia's throat clogged up and her eyes opened wide.

If she became angry at her determination being called into question, or if she felt insulted and indignant, Subaru was prepared to be yelled at and to take on her reproach.

However, within her trembling, violet eyes, there was only a faint flicker of anxiety and fear. Her heart being eaten away by these negative emotions was such that she could not give an immediate reply.

Subaru: "If you can't take the Trials, I will take them for you."

Emilia: "—!? But Subaru, that's..."

Subaru: "At least I've already cleared the First Trial. That means breaking through the other two Trials won't be impossible either. So, if you're having any second thoughts about going back into the Trials, I will gallantly do it for you. It's the reason I am here, after all."

Emilia: "For a reason like that... for, me...?"

Subaru: "Of course."

Emilia faltered as if she was preparing to be denied, but Subaru answered her loud and clear. Watching her eyes widen as her emotions intensified, Subaru stared straight into her eyes,

Subaru: “I am here for you, and if you are scared, I will do it for you. Even if Roswaal or anyone else says that Emilia-tan has to be the one to liberate the Sanctuary, or that it has to be your achievement... Whatever I achieve, whatever praise I might receive, I devote them all to you. So I don’t mind.”

Emilia: “Why would you... do so much for me...”

Subaru: “Didn’t I tell you before? Because I fell in love with you, because I fell super in love with you.”

Emilia’s breath stopped, and the faces of everyone in the room showed some kind of reaction.

Subaru didn’t pay them any mind, and only fixed his gaze on the shaken Emilia, and shrugged,

Subaru: “That’s why, I plan to challenge the Trials. What about you, Emilia-tan? If it’s really too hard, it’s ok if you want to sleep in the house.”

Emilia: “———Subaru you, blockhead.”

Seeing the corners of Subaru’s lips drawing upward, Emilia slightly pouted her lips.

Then, lifting up her downcast face, she forcefully wiped her eyes, and turned her lips into the shape of a smile.

Emilia: “When you say it like that, how can I just shut myself in a room and wait. You know... you’re reeeaaally unfair. Reeeaaally dumb. And I reeeaaally... thank you.”

Subaru: “Eh? Wha? What was that last one? You reeeaaally love me too?”

Emilia: “Totally wrong! I was gonna say I’m really grateful and...”

Subaru: “Oh. I see. Even though I heard it this time, can I just hear it one more time please!”

Emilia: “Subaru you blockhead!!”

Getting carried away, Subaru held his ear right up to her, when Emilia shouted back at the top of her lungs.

Even if her voice was as beautiful as silver chimes, with a direct hit on his eardrums at this volume, it was nothing less than a sonic weapon. Subaru looked like he was about to pass out, but still managed to throw Emilia a smile as she huffed her shoulders up and down.

Subaru: “See, that’s more like it. Alright, then let’s give it our best again. I’ll start on *men* two, Emilia-tan on *men*⁷¹ one.”

Emilia: “Hmph. I’ll catch up before you know it, then I’ll just keep going, and I’ll be sure to leave you way behind in the dust. Subaru’s achievements or whatever, I won’t let you have a single one.”

Subaru: “Not a single one? But I’ll need at least one for a chance to come bother Emilia-tan for a reward or two afterwards.”

Seeing Subaru still not learning his lesson, Emilia pouted up her lips and poked out her tongue.

During this back and forth between them, Subaru wondered if he had managed to help just a little in getting her back on her feet. One way or another, the real Trials are only beginning.

Subaru: “With me and Emilia-tan’s *doki-doki-chikara*⁷², the Trials or whatever will be a piece of cake.”

Clicking his fingers and sparkling his teeth, Subaru expressed his resolution by striking a thumbs-up. Listening to his words, Emilia only stuck out her tongue, and,

Emilia: “It’s more than enough with just me. Tomorrow I’ll show you, I can do it on my own without Subaru looking after me.”

And, this way, she kept up her strong facade in front of him.

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⁷¹ English flip. Means “(video game) level/stage” (面), originally “ステージ” (stage).

⁷² English flip. Means “ba-dum-ba-dum ability” (ドキドキ力), originally “ラブラブパワー” (love-love-power). References the trend of saying characters in love are “doki-doki”.

Watching Subaru and Emilia taunting each other and pumping each other up, Ryuzu brought the already cold tea up to her lips.

Tasting its faint, lingering warmth on the tip of her tongue, she fondly watched the conversation between the silver-haired half-elf and the black-haired youth.

Ryuzu: “Where will things go from here, I wonder... Would everything really happen as Witch-sama intended?”

Garfiel: “Kheh. Who knows. No matter which way it turns, I a’ready know it’ll be something that’ll make me wanna puke.”

Listening to Ryuzu’s mutterings, Garfiel replied in a voice that didn’t intend to hide his displeasure.

Watching the side of the youth’s face, Ryuzu quietly sighed in a way that no one else could have noticed,

Ryuzu: “To force such burdens on these kind children. How egregious the sins of this ancient self must be... We are beyond redemption— At least, I hope it doesn’t come to that in the end.”

Tilting the tea to her lips, those words fell without having reached anyone, and only stirred up a small wave on the surface of the lukewarm amber-colored tea – which, too, vanished without a trace.

Arc 4 Chapter 22 - Weakness

Has been cut from the Light Novel Adaptation, would be found in Volume 10

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#)

—Subaru woke in the darkness and slowly sat himself up.

Pulling aside the thin blanket covering over his body, he did a light stretch while taking care not to make any noise. Pressing back a yawn and turning his neck about, he could hear a multitude of snoring around him.

Although he had been sleeping in a corner of a crowd of sleepers scattered all over the floor, Subaru appeared to be the only one who was awake. It was only natural—the sky was still dark outside the great window of the cathedral, and it was not yet the hour for the Sun to show its face.

Even though he couldn't tell the time without the convenience of a clock, it was clearly still middle of the night, and not an hour suitable for human activity. Usually, he'd keep sleeping even after the sun came up, but,

Subaru: "I went to bed too early and now I couldn't fall asleep, huh... Makes me miss the days when I get to slack off whenever I have time."

Roughly scratching his head, Subaru folded his blanket, and quietly pulled himself out of bed.

The masses of people sleeping around him were the refugees from Arlam Village, currently confined along with Roswaal within the Sanctuary.

Subaru had given up his place in the small residence allotted to him and decided to pass the night here in their company. The reason, was not so complicated.

Inside the cathedral, the people had given Subaru a spot in the corner behind the front wall. It was probably because they were looking out for him, that they gave him in such a comfortable spot. On the other hand, if there was just one downside, it would've probably been the fact that all the children were also bunched around him.

But then again, the children liked Subaru, so naturally they came snuggling next to him, and while the adults remained in a state of confinement, he thought it would be best to lighten the burden of the children as much as possible. So he had no complaints once he thought about it that way.

Subaru: "It really isn't like me to be thinking about these kinds of things, is it."

He couldn't help but smile at himself bitterly for becoming so considerate all of a sudden. After all, life's no fun if you get too hung up about such complicated things.

Being careful not to wake the children, who were noisily sleeping in full-force, Subaru passed through the mire of sleeping villagers instead on his way out of the cathedral — A damp wind came greeting him as he went out; the lukewarm air was neither warm nor cold, and only managed to add to his discomfort-index.

Looking up, the thick clouds that had lined up in the sky had covered over the pleasing radiance of the previous night's stars. The layers upon layers of clouds moved rapidly along with the wind. He wasn't sure if the weather would turn, but it was unlikely that it would be a clear day ahead.

Subaru: "Come to think of it, I haven't encountered a drop of rain since I got here. Going by what everyone said, I would imagine there's something like seasons here."

He seemed to remember hearing at some point that the seasons here were split into "Red-Sun, Blue-Sun, Yellow-Sun, and Green-Sun", each matching a magical element type. If these were like the seasons of the original world, perhaps there would be a "rainy season" somewhere in there as well. The temperatures were neither too hot nor too cold right now, and the feeling of the wind precisely matched his impression of the days that preceded the summer rains.

Subaru: "During the rainy seasons, it's always a headache that the laundry wouldn't dry. The ten-thousand-year futon is in a precarious situation to begin with, if it doesn't get dried in the sun on the occasional holiday, we'll be in trouble... But then again, every day was a holiday for me."

Basically, since he was always on the futon, there was no chance to actually dry the futon. Occasionally, his mother would run out of patience and roll Subaru off the futon and snatch it from him, and then offer it up to the fragrant rays of the Great Sun-sama, as was the Natsuki family way.

Reminiscing on those nostalgic days, Subaru loosened up the different parts of his body with the usual radio-calisthenics. The great cathedral, true to its name, was an enormous building covering over a huge plot of land, and even with the sleepers all strewn about the floor, there was still enough room for each person to stretch their limbs. Blankets had been distributed to everyone as well, so there were no complaints in that regard.

If there was anything he was dissatisfied with, it would have been a question of luxury, as having to sleep on the hard floor had been putting pressure on several points in his body.

Subaru: "I miss my old flattened futon, or the fluffy bed in the mansion. But it's only my fourth or fifth day, just imagine what the other people must feel about having to sleep like this all this time."

Even though everyone acted like they were in high spirits in front of Subaru, it was undeniable that their faces were growing more burdened with each passing day. At mealtimes and the likes, Subaru would fool around and rouse up their smiling faces, but other than that, everyone rarely spoke, most likely because of the stress.

After an evacuation they didn't wish for, they had become imprisoned in their place of refuge. The Lord to whom they had originally directed their discontent was already wounded on their behalf, and so, more than discontent about their present situation, the sentiment among the villagers' was closer to anxiety regarding their future.

Since Subaru was technically a part of the Lord's faction, it wouldn't have come as a surprise if the villagers blamed him for their plight, but—

Subaru: "They didn't even blame me like I expected. It's really a failure on the leadership's part to have to depend on the good sensibility of its people like this."

The truth is, the main reason the villagers didn't turn on Subaru was because they still felt a strong sense of gratitude and indebtedness toward him.

It's just that Subaru himself didn't think so highly of his own achievements, so he was still under the impression that the refugees were just simple-minded. But,

Subaru: "I can't get used to living off of everyone's good graces like this."

—Subaru and the others have already entered their sixth day since they arrived at the Sanctuary.

The refugees had arrived almost a week before Subaru did, so they have actually already spent nearly two weeks in captivity.

They have already heard from Subaru how the people who evacuated to the Capital had returned safely, so there wasn't too much worry about their separated family members, but having nothing to do for two weeks was beginning to take a mental toll.

Moreover, it was only a matter of time before the sympathy generated by Roswaal's yolo-self-destruct-battle-plan wore off.

When that time comes, the villagers and the locals would be on a course set to collide, and that was something he mustn't allow, if he wished to obtain the support of both sides.

Subaru: "In fact, I'm stuck. What should I do..."

???: "—That's far'nough right there, not another step, yeah?"

While he was shaking his head worrying, he was stopped mid-step by a shout.

Subaru froze in his posture with one foot off the ground and looked around by turning his eyes with his head still halfway through a headshake. Within his field of vision, there was nothing but trees in the vast darkness that shrouded over the forest. Wandering not far from the vicinity of the cathedral, the one Subaru found was,

Garfiel: "Takin' a stroll so early in th'morning? Can't tell if y'got a nice hobby or if you're just in a laid-back mood. Feels like «Mujigemujige gettin' lost between the red and green berries» here."

Muttering another one of his usual idioms that didn't sound familiar at all, above Subaru's head — the golden-haired youth leapt off of a branch, and flew down.

All his short hair standing on end, Garfiel landed on all four limbs upon the grass without making a sound, and closed one of his eyes as he looked up at Subaru,

Garfiel: "You don't look too surprised. Then where's the fun in scaring ya?"

Subaru: "I might have been scared if I didn't think I'd run into you, but I had a feeling I'd find you if I wandered around here. Didn't expect you to come from up in the trees though."

Garfiel: "You were lookin' for me?"

Looking skeptical, Garfiel stood up, facing against Subaru who was a half a head taller than he was. Subaru straightened up his chest rather pointlessly, and replied "Uh-huh",

Subaru: "I thought it was too early and the chances wouldn't be very good, but I'm glad I bumped into you... Just curious though, why did you want to scare me?"

Garfiel: "It's no big deal. Ahead from here, that side of the forest's my huntin' ground. If you get y'rself lost in there I might end up crunchin' on your neck, that's all."

Subaru: "Don't just say that like it's no big deal! That was totally a big deal!"

Shocked by how casually Garfiel let that frightening information slip, Subaru's indignant protest resounded outwards...

...ripping through the silence of the forest in between the dawn and the dark of night, sending the sleeping birds and beasts scurrying in retreat.

Garfiel: "...Tch. Oy, you just scared'em all away, what'm I gonna eat now?"

Subaru: "They're a bunch cowards. If you eat wimpy guys like that you'll only absorb their weakness anyway— That's one way to think about it, so how about we just magnanimously let that slide this time."

Garfiel: "Or how 'bout I make all the meat disappear from your plate from this day onwards to make up for it."

Subaru: “I’m sorry! I didn’t mean to! Please forgive me! Today I’ll go fishing with Otto down by the river and make it up to you!”

There wasn’t much for a merchant to do in these last few days, so Otto took up fishing, and had been heading to the river every day. Unfortunately, all his customers were about five centimeters long, so he had pretty much been giving away free bait for nothing, which seemed just like something Otto would do.

Hearing Otto’s name come up, Garfiel smirked up the corner of his mouth and bared his fangs,

Garfiel: “Hah, that lil’bro’s got such abysmal luck it doesn’t even make sense. Not like his head’s dumb or anything. But he’s just like how «Even the sky bewails how sensitive Denzen’s to the rain», yeah?”

Subaru: “Well I say he’s a *dokujin*⁷³ that’s here to liven up the mood, something that should be a part of every household, and pretty good for bouncing jokes off of. He’s also saved my ass quite a few times... But he’s mostly for livening up the mood, though.”

If Otto was around to hear that, he would probably be protesting with tears in his eyes about the merciless review he got.

Listening to these not-exactly-flattering compliments, Garfiel scratched his ear with a finger, muttering “Livenin’ up the mood huh...”,

Garfiel: “Then, how’s the livenin’ up workin’ out for ya?”

Subaru: “What d’you mean?”

Garfiel: “Don’t play dumb. It’s pretty obvious th’fellas in cathedral’re almost at their limits. Don’t need me to tell ya this, but you and the lil’bro can’t keep’em distracted forever.”

Subaru: “You got me where it hurts there... You know, you’re surprisingly observant sometimes.”

Garfiel had caught on to Subaru’s concerns precisely. Receiving this unexpected compliment from Subaru, Garfiel crunched up his nose,

⁷³ English flip. Means “unique/peculiar character” (独自の人), originally “ユニークキャラ” (unique character).

Garfiel: “Caus’of all kinds of reasons, I got to be the one who gets to see those cathedral guys the most. After all, the other guys includin’ the Granny barely would even show their face. Naturally, this’s how it turned out.”

Subaru: “To think you’re actually the guy preparing the meals for us. The first time I saw that I thought there was something wrong with my eyes for a second.”

Garfiel: “If you want the food to taste the way you want it, you gotta have t’do it yourself. Anyway, I’m not talkin’ about that.”

Taking a step forward, Garfiel raised up a single finger in front of Subaru’s face,

Garfiel: “The hostage fellas’re close to their limit— How long are you gonna keep up this pointless struggle for?”

Subaru: “Pointless struggle... I don’t know what you mean...”

Garfiel: “Hah. Y’got some guts t’say that. What else you gonna call it besides pointless strugglin’?— You’ve already been stuck in the same place for three goddamn days.”

Noticing Subaru’s tone weaken, Garfiel sneered back at him through the gaps between his teeth. Subaru opened his mouth wanting to refute him, but, unable to think of anything off the top of his head, no words came out.

Seeing him like this, a tinge of disappointment emerged in Garfiel’s narrowed, emerald-green eyes.

Garfiel: “Cough it up. What’re y’really thinkin’? Gonna wait till I cut open your gut before ya talk?”

Subaru: “Talking about cutting open guts kind of brings back some bad memories for me, so I’d prefer if you don’t phrase it like that... Although, judging by the atmosphere, you might not be joking.”

Garfiel was slouching down his already short body. Although his attitude wasn’t hostile, an unearthly aura of rage was emanating from his entire body.

While it was physical and direct, Subaru didn’t feel the need to worry about its violence being directed toward him. However—

Subaru: “First, let’s just be clear on this. I’m on Emilia’s side. I have total faith in her, without the slightest doubt. So I believe without a doubt that even if it takes time, Emilia will break through the Trials.”

Garfiel: “As if I’d believe that fairytale at this point. Your sheltered Princess-sama— Already had to be pulled outta there crying three days in a row now, you honestly think she can do it?”

Their opinions were completely irreconcilable.

Garfiel’s gaze held a sharpness that did not hide his contempt. While Subaru was at a disadvantage, he nonetheless tried to meet it by making his *sanpaku* eyes as sharp as he could — His feelings for Emilia would not allow him to lose.

This was the morning of the sixth day since Subaru and the others arrived in the Sanctuary. And three days had already passed since Subaru broke through the First Trial. If you were to ask what happened in that time, then—

Garfiel: “Never would’ve thought there’d be a restriction on starting the Second Trial long as someone’s stuck in the first one. Thanks t’ that, the Trials’ not made a bit’of progress in three damn days.”

Subaru: “———”

Garfiel: “If we knew it was gonna be like this we might as well’ve sent you in alone, yeah? That way, at least we won’t be trippin’ over the same rock y’already could’a stepped over.”

Garfiel’s words didn’t conceal any of his bitterness — but he was right. He had described the reality facing Subaru and Emilia exactly as it was. Since Subaru passed the First Trial three days ago there had been no progress made in the Trials of the Tomb. The reason was simple.

Emilia was still in the First Trial. That is, she still couldn’t overcome her past.

Subaru: “The past that needs to be resolved is different for everyone. Unlike me, who got to live a carefree life, obviously she’d be weighed down by all sorts of things. So I don’t think of her as a burden at all.”

Garfiel: “That so? Y’re just bein’ gentle with the one you’ve got a thing for. But d’you think anyone else cares about her like you do? Honestly, my opinion of Princess-sama’s been droppin down’n’down’n’down, even as we speak.”

Subaru: “That’s...”

Garfiel: “It’s ‘bout time you admitted it. If we get rid of Princess-sama, at least you can get your ass into the Second Trial. That way, ‘least we’d be doin’ something real about freein’ this place, anyone can figure out that much.”

Garfiel’s made it sound easy — but it was a decision that would mean trampling on Emilia’s resolve.

It would mean abandoning the bulk of Roswaal’s designs, and tarnishing that pristine nobility of Emilia’s heart which Subaru believed in. No matter what, he will not agree to it. But, what made Subaru hesitate instead of firmly shaking his head was,

Subaru: “If only there was time, she can definitely get through it. There wouldn’t be any need to rush her or hurry her. But...”

Garfiel: “Even you can see that time’s not something we have, right? Beginnin’ with me, our short-tempered guys in the Sanctuary are startin’ to run out’of patience, and the hostage-fellas aren’t gonna take much longer of bein’ caged-in— It’s only a matter of time before th’growin’ discontent bursts, don’t y’think?”

—In the end, it was all a problem of limited time.

No matter what kind of past Emilia must face, Subaru had no doubt that she will overcome it in the end. But it takes time to defeat such deep-rooted wounds. If Subaru could help, he’d have the spirit to challenge anything in the face of all hardships.

But the bygone past existed only within her, and Subaru had no way to offer his outstretched hand. From Rem, Subaru had received the courage to face his past, and he couldn’t help but wonder if somehow, he could do the same for Emilia.

As long as there was time, she will be able to overcome the Trials. But right now, they didn’t have the time for that.

Just as Garfiel pointed out, the two groups inside the Sanctuary were both nearing their limits while time was constantly draining away. They mustn't wait any longer. Therefore, Subaru came to a single conclusion.

Subaru: “—I have, a proposal.”

Touching his jaw, Subaru wrenched out these words between his lips.

Seeing the change in Subaru's expression, Garfiel closed one eye and twisted his mouth into the shape of smile.

Garfiel: “I'm all ears.”

Subaru: “I think we can agree that the problem for both sides is time. I have faith in Emilia to pass the Trials, but to do it she needs time. On the other hand, you guys are right on the verge of the time limit before balance collapses. No problems so far?”

Garfiel: “Nothin' wrong so far. If I just got one thing to add, I honestly doubt Princess-sama will end up passin' the Trials, or if she's even capable of it.”

Subaru: “...I think we should just reserve our own opinions on that part. Either way, if we can both agree that time will become the bottleneck, then you should be interested to hear my proposal.”

Listening to Subaru's case, Garfiel touched the white scar on his forehead without saying a word. Sensing that Garfiel was beckoning him to continue, Subaru returned a nod, and,

Subaru: “Right now, the imprisoned refugees are at the end of their ropes. It won't be long before someone breaks, and in the worst case, there could be a clash between the factions inside the Sanctuary.”

Garfiel: “Won't really worry to me if that happens? Even if there's a mob of a hundred or two villagers, I'll just be flippin'em all back, not much to it.”

Subaru: “There's forty-two... and it's not a matter of what you'll do. I'm talking about an undesirable conflict, and the damage it would cause. I'm sure even you don't want to use violence on the people you've been making meals for every day, do you?”

Garfiel: “Well, y’got a point.”

Turning his gaze away, Garfiel clicked his tongue somewhat awkwardly. From his reaction, Subaru could sense that Garfiel had some goodness inside, and secretly nodded in his heart.

Subaru: “So, to avoid such a conflict, I would like to request the release of the prisoners. As it is, I don’t think they have any more value as hostages. What do you say?”

Garfiel: “Oyoy, hold it. This’n that’re two different stories, aren’t they? First tell me what y’mean they’re no good as hostages?”

Subaru: “In the first place, the reason you imprisoned them was to lure us... or rather, lure Emilia here, wasn’t it? We already entered the Sanctuary as you intended, and began the Trials in accordance with your conditions. The food and care, and the need to watch over the hostages aren’t free, and you don’t have unlimited supply. In fact, the fact that you are diligently out here hunting at a time somewhere between night and dawn couldn’t have nothing to do with it.”

From what Subaru can see, the Sanctuary was a vast territory when including the forests, but only an extremely small portion of that was being used – In fact, the number of half-bloods living in the Sanctuary was probably about the same as the number of refugees from Arlam Village.

To put it simply, the food consumption within the Sanctuary would have been doubled from what it was before. Due to the special characteristics of the land, it was obviously unlikely that they’d be able to purchase any food from travelling traders, so their food could only be coming primarily from hunting and local produce. Therefore,

Subaru: “There’s no need to keep holding onto hostages that’ll only be a burden on your supplies. Even without the hostages, we already have no way to leave, now that we’re half-way through the Trials.”

Garfiel: “‘S that so. Either way, immediately upon entering the Sanctuary, the half-... Princess-sama would already’ve been bound by the curse of the land. If Princess-sama wants to leave, one way or another, the Trials will have to be overcome... Ah, so that’s how it is.”

Saying this while digesting the meaning of Subaru’s proposal, Garfiel nodded several times as his cheeks twisted into a cruel smile. Seeing him like this, Subaru understood that he certainly wasn’t slow in the

head at all. Aside from his usual attitudes, if it was purely a matter of making decisions based on the facts, then,

Garfiel: "If we release the hostages, whether it's food supplies or th'internal rifts, we'll get t' avoid these unavoidable problems. That's the idea, yeah? In fact, looks like the only thing standin' in between the hostages and the outside world is me, ain' it?"

Subaru: "If everything had been going along with your plans so far, wouldn't you prefer to let it carry on to the end? After all, your goal is to be released from the Sanctuary, not mutual destruction."

Garfiel: "Guess that's what it'd be if we respect the Granny's opinions... Well, it's just details anyway."

With a wave of his hand, Garfiel took in Subaru's opinion for the time being. Then, touching his jaw, he sank deep into thought,

Garfiel: "But why on earth'd you come talkin' to me? The head'of this place is Granny, not me? If you wanted someone to approve your idea, you coulda done better talkin' to Granny. Odd havin' t'say it myself, but, you do realize talkin' to me could just be makin' things more complicated?"

Subaru: "It's to keep things from getting complicated that I'm talking to you. If I properly explain all the pros and cons to Ryuzu-san, I think I could convince her. But if I do that, I still wouldn't know how you'd react."

If it was the rational and pragmatic Ryuzu, she would probably accept Subaru's proposal without any issues. In fact, Subaru was confident that he could convince her.

But when it came time to face Garfiel after concluding the high-level talks, then,

Subaru: "One way or another, convincing you is the hard part. Unfortunately, according to my self-assessments, I'll be totally helpless if you decide to use force. So I figured I should sort out the unpredictable factors first, so that I won't have to worry about them later."

Garfiel: "Ain't that a pretty clever way'of thinkin', oy. That's it, yeah? If you bring your proposal to Granny, I'll come screwin' it up, that it? You got somethin' you wanna say t'me? Wanna say it with my fist in your face, huh?"

Subaru: “We were just having a civilized conversation a few second ago, how did it suddenly go tumbling in that direction...”

Garfiel: “I only get t’use my head for talkin’ for three minutes, tops. You already gone over th’time limit, no point sayin’ anythin’ now.”

Subaru: “Why are you saying that looking so smug!”

Garfiel held up his fists, and Subaru held up his hands to surrender. Of course, Garfiel wasn’t being serious, and only sighed as if he was bored, and,

Garfiel: “Hah, gettin’ hit with this stuff first thing in th’mornin’. Yeah, sure, do what y’want. If you can convince Granny, I won’t say nothin’. They’re a damn nuisance anyway. Do it however you like, long as you get rid of’em.”

Subaru: “Is that so, then I’ll take you up on that and...”

Garfiel: “—But, I got one condition.”

Just as Subaru thought he had passed over the most unpredictable hurdle and was about to breathe a sigh of relief, Garfiel’s words came down like a bucket of cold water. Seeing Subaru furrow his brows, Garfiel stuck out a single finger,

Garfiel: “Whether I accept your proposal is one thing. But if you don’t accept mine, there’s nothin’ we got to talk about.”

Subaru: “...But this benefits on your end as well. There’s food supplies, and you’ll be avoiding infighting.”

Garfiel: “Y’tthink either of those matters t’m? If we run out’a food for the hostages, we could always start cull’n the herd. If some’of the guys lose it and start gettin’ violent, I’m more’n enough to handle it m’self. We aren’t on equal footings here, y’understand?”

Subaru: “...What’s, your condition?”

Hearing Subaru wrench out these words while gritting his teeth, Garfiel tossed back “Should’a said that in the first place” and clacked his canine fangs. Then, looking over Subaru from head to toe,

Garfiel: “My... No, the Sanctuary’s conditions’re simple. You’ll be the one to take the Trials. Do that, n’t the rest is easy.”

Subaru: “—! Wait, that can’t be right. If I do that then the whole point of...”

It’s true that this option had went through Subaru’s mind many times before.

But it was only the last resort, the one he must try to avoid if he could. More importantly, if he did so, then all of Emilia’s efforts up to now would be—

Garfiel: “You might be misunderstandin’ something, so let me tell y’now... Me or Granny or th’others, long as we get released from the Sanctuary, we don’t really care who does it.”

Subaru: “———”

Garfiel: “If you want Princess-sama to do it and get some compliments from the hostages or Granny or others, that’s just your thing. It’s none’ of my business what happened in your pasts or why you’re wantin’ to get over’em. All’n all, it’s just your own problems, ain’t it?”

There was no way to argue with that.

Garfiel was absolutely right, and Subaru, having completely overlooked their side of the story, had no right to insist on such things. Just as he said, whether it was wanting Emilia to take the Trials, or wanting her to be the one to overcome it, they were all just Subaru’s own problems. And even more than that,

Garfiel: “—Besides, ‘s it really so important t’overcome the Past?”

Subaru: “Eh?”

Garfiel: “It’s been three days. Three. We had t’watch Princess-sama goin’ into the Trials every day n’pull her out cryin’. Honestly, I can’t stand watchin’ anymore.”

Subaru: “Can’t stand... watching...”

Garfiel: “Her gettin’ pumped up for nothin’ only t’get all hurt? Gettin’ ahead of herself like «I have to do it no matter what», and comin’ back wimperin’ and apologizin’ sorry she couldn’t do it. So why in the hell’re y’s still makin’ Princess-sama take th’Trials?”

Garfiel's words accurately summed up what happened to Emilia over past three days.

The next night after the beginning of the Trials, Emilia challenged the First Trial for the second time, and again she failed to overcome her past. But more importantly, Subaru, who had gone in with her, was not sent into a Trial at all.

At first, Subaru couldn't understand why the Tomb had left him out, but Emilia answered him when she returned halfway through the Trial — Someone in the Trial had told her the reason why Subaru couldn't begin the next Trial. It was very simple—

—The Second Trial takes place in the room beyond the First Trial.

Inside the Tomb, in the back of the room where the First Trial took place, there was a sealed rectangular door. Subaru originally thought it would only open after all three Trials had been passed — But in fact, it was the Second Trial waiting on the other side. Only someone who had passed the First Trial would be qualified to proceed.

In other words, if Subaru wasn't alone, he would not be able to challenge the Second Trial. And the reason he didn't go alone even after he knew this was—

Subaru: "Emilia, will definitely overcome the Trials. So we..."

Garfiel: "That expectation's just a bit too heavy, isn't it. You don't see Princess-sama sufferin' enough as it is? Makin' her force herself to face those memories, hurtin' and makin' her end up lookin' like that, is that what you people wanted? Is that what Princess-sama wants? My head's too dumb to understand it."

Subaru: "What Emilia... wants..."

Garfiel said those words while scratching at his head, but to Subaru, it was like the jolt of being woken up from having ice water poured over his face.

Up until now, Subaru had respected Emilia's resolve to take on the Trials, and had devoted all his efforts to support her. Even knowing that it will be an arduous path, as long as she doesn't give up, he would continue to lend her his hand.

And, even as she continued to stand back up time and time again, it never once occurred to him to find out what she really wanted.

Come to think of it, Subaru didn't even know why Emilia wanted to be the Monarch.

The declaration she made in the Royal Selection Hall, about her intention to bring equality to all, could not possibly have been her reason to want to become the Monarch.

From the unfair treatment and prejudice she continued to receive, one could imagine what must have accompanied Emilia all throughout her life. What were her thoughts as she lived through that, what were her feelings, her beliefs that made her decide to aim for the Throne?

Even in spite of his unrelenting desire to be at her side and to become her support, Subaru had neglected to ask the questions he should have asked at the start.

How did Emilia and Roswaal meet in the first place? Why would Roswaal help a half-elf become the Ruler? Her qualification to be the Monarch — to be the Dragon Maiden was proven by the gem on the Insignia, but how did Roswaal get the chance to let the Insignia touch her hand? What kind of common interests did Emilia and Roswaal have that made them form this cooperative relationship — Subaru didn't know a single one those answers.

He had managed to come this far, without knowing a thing.

Garfiel: "Oy, don't know what kind'a shock y're busy experiencin', but if y'got nothin' else t'say I'm gonna go. I'm still in th'middle of huntin'... N'bout that proposal, if y'agree t'my condition, go ahead and tell Granny about it. I won't be botherin' with the rest of it."

After giving Subaru who remained in suspended animation a shrug, Garfiel's figure disappeared into the dawn-lit forest.

Before he noticed it, the morning sun had already chased away the shroud of night, and the dense tangle of the shade-befallen forest had given way to the quiet peace of morning — with dewdrops resting upon sprouting leaves, it was that kind of hour. Left behind, Subaru looked up at the sky.

Above, between the gaps of trees and through the towering clouds, he caught a glimpse of the emerging sun — which, soon hiding behind the clouds once more, vanished along with the momentary radiance it brought upon the world.

Squinting his eyes at that momentary light, Subaru started to walk.

Subaru: “All I saw was myself facing my past, finding closure, and feeling glad that I did. But, for Emilia...”

Subaru had been convinced that it was something anyone could resolve and walk away from.

Because he had been healed by the warmth of those memories he received, he was convinced that saying farewell to the past was the only way forward. Being so smothered by the kindness of those around him, Subaru got the impression that the past was something that ought to be looked back on.

Yet, Subaru’s thoughts—

Emilia: “—Su... baru?”

For that silver haired girl hugging her knees in the corner of the room, how heavily they must have been weighing down on her.

Inside the house assigned to her, sitting on the ice-cold floor beside her bed, Emilia was quietly, quietly, waiting for time to pass.

She was usually no good in the mornings, but it didn’t come as surprise to find her awake so early. Her eyes as they turned to him were bloodshot, and across her beautiful, majestic face were dark streaks left behind by tears — The fact that she hadn’t slept for a second was as clear as day.

Noticing Subaru’s arrival, she turned her face away so he would not see that she had been crying.

Emilia: “Ah, s... Sorry. I-is it time? It’s time already? It’s sooner than I thought... But, I must. I must do my best... It’s, time for the Trials, isn’t it?”

Subaru: “Emilia-tan.”

Emilia: “I—it’s alright. Today for sure, this time, for sure, I... Enn, I will definitely pass. I—I’m already figuring out more or less what is going to, happen in the Trial. See, it’s the same pa... tterns. Subaru said, enn, that, yeah, see, I know... Enn, so, I—I’m alright...”

Subaru: “Emilia-tan, it’s fine. It’s not night-time yet, last night hasn’t even ended. It’s morning now. It’s still, a long time away.”

Emilia: “I—I’ll be able to tell if you try to dupe me. Because, look... it’s, dark outside. Mornings, should be brighter... Ah, but, my, conversation with the Micro Spirits today...”

Looking up at Subaru, mumbling this under her breath, Emilia’s eyes were shuddering. Inside them, were the shock and anger at herself for having failed to abide by her contract, and she looked as if she was about to sever their bond just to punish herself or her own neglect.

Subaru: “Emilia!”

Emilia: “Ah...”

Grabbing her hand mid-air, Subaru entwined his fingers with hers.

Seeing their hands tied together, Emilia was stunned into silence, and, gradually, she saw her own reflection inside Subaru’s black eyes.

Emilia: “I—I...”

Subaru: “I’m the only one here right now. So no matter how weak you want to be, it’s alright. There’s no need to rush, or push yourself too hard. I will always stay by your side. No matter what.”

Emilia: “Su... baru...”

Clinging onto his outstretched hand, Emilia quietly whispered his name as she let her head drop to the side. Just like this, letting her hold onto his arm, Subaru sat down beside her.

With his free hand, he slowly patted her silver hair as her body slowly lost its strength, until, after a little while, he could hear her soundly asleep.

She must have been exhausted. But even so, she couldn't pass the night alone, and had to lean on Subaru in the end.

Taking a glance at the sleeping Emilia, quietly breathing beside him, Subaru lightly traced his finger over her adorable cheeks, and confirmed the traces of her tears.

—This was as far as she will go, he decided.

Arc 4 Chapter 23 - One Step Forward

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 10, Chapter 5 “The First Step Forward”, Parts 6-8

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

Subaru: “Alright, I’ll just be gone for a bit. We should be back by tomorrow and... I know I said this a few times already, but, there’s no need to push yourself by taking the Trials anymore. Just rest a little.”

Emilia: “I knooow, I get it already. Geez Subaru, you don’t have to look so worried. I’ll be good and take the day off, just like you told me to.”

Emilia pouted her lips as she said this, looking up at Subaru aboard the carriage.

Subaru wryly smiled in front of her adorable antics, and made an effort to hide the pain inside his heart.

The time was a little before noon, on the same day as his conversation with Garfiel, and several hours had passed since he visited Emilia in her room.

Otto: “Natsuki-san, we’re all set here. You can just say the word.”

Subaru: “Oooh, that was quick. The speed at which you must be able to skip town after committing some heinous deed is truly impressive. From now on, shall I call you «Otto the Night-Skipper»?”

Otto: “I’ve no idea what the term «Night-Skipper» means, but I’m almost definitely certain it’s something disreputable and so I’m afraid I’ll have to firmly decline.”

Otto curled his lip into a scowl and started shooting Subaru a stink look, to which Subaru only shot an unreservedly wry smile in return. Looking past Otto, one could see the dragon carriages of Subaru’s party lined up along the road.

Numbering six in total, they would accommodate forty-two people in all. Which would be the total number of refugees and hired merchants from Arlam Village, if you didn't count the one extra traveling merchant who happened to be tagging along. This meant that,

Subaru: "Really, it's almost disappointing how easily they went along with the idea... Honestly, I was preparing for a little more resistance."

Ram: "That's because Barusu cleverly went behind everyone's back to negotiate with Garf beforehand, isn't it? You figured Ryuzu-sama can be reasoned with, so as long as Garf didn't interrupt your negotiations, there won't be any problems."

While Subaru was busy scratching his neck, Ram, dressed in her usual maid's uniform, threw these words at him from the base of the carriage. From beneath her peach-colored hair, she was looking up at him with her usual expression of disdain.

Ram: "Ram would have liked to lodge a complaint about how you didn't obtain freedom for Roswaal-sama as well, but..."

Subaru: "Being the hostage of all hostage, he's a bit more suited to stay behind, I think. Even if you wanted me negotiate for him, I wouldn't know what to say to them. All things considered, it was already a pretty big accomplishment getting them to let the villagers go, so please understand!"

Ram: "...you did well, for a Barusu, that's all I have to say. Now show some gratitude to Ram."

Subaru: "Why do I get the feeling that if I thanked you here, I'd be losing out somehow?"

Just as all of Heaven and Earth shuddered at Ram's acknowledgement of Subaru's success, Subaru turned his eyes back on Emilia, who was fidgeting beside her.

There was anxiety and gloom within her violet eyes, but when she noticed Subaru's gaze turning towards her, she quickly chased those sentiments away.

Emilia: "Thank you... You know, if you hadn't gone ahead and said anything, I, don't think I would've even noticed what was going on."

Subaru: “Emilia-tan already has an important enough role as Emilia-tan. All the things that are going on around you, you can just leave that stuff to us. You’ve only got one big task to focus on. And we’ll handle everything else, so don’t worry.”

Watching Subaru forcefully slap a hand onto his chest, Emilia covered her mouth, but couldn’t stop a giggle from leaking out. Then, wiping away the tears that had welled up in her eyes, she nodded with an “Hnn”, and,

Emilia: “I understand. Then I’ll leave it to you, Subaru. And...”

Subaru: “I know, I know. Don’t worry, as soon as I get everyone to the village, I’ll come back to you right away. Of course, I could also take the opportunity to bring back any precious stuffed animals that you may have forgotten at the mansion?”

Emilia: “I outgrew that stuff a long time ago. Also, I’m not asking you to come back quickly. But of course, I would be happier if you did come back quickly...”

Subaru: “Then, what’re you trying to say?”

Emilia: “...come back safe. Of course, the sooner you come back the better, but, I’d be even happier if you came back safe.”

Subaru: “Aagh, my heart!”

Wriggling around for a second, overwhelmed by the pain of love in his chest, Subaru covered his love-sick heart with both hands and stumbled backwards. Emilia tilted her head in confusion, but Subaru, still busy hyperventilating, extended his palm towards her.

Subaru: “Ok ok, I got it already. Quickly, and safely, I promise I will come back to your side. Unless you want me to pinky-promise too?”

Emilia: “That thing you did with Petra about what happens if you lie? ...Sure, ok. Let’s do it.”

Subaru: “Ouuuggghh, so straightforward.”

Emilia took a step forward, and Subaru bent his knees to meet her. Just like this, Subaru, from up on the carriage, and Emilia, standing below, tangled their pinkies together. And then, chanting out the traditional spell, they sealed their promise as their fingers parted.

For a moment, Emilia continued to stare at her finger that had separated from Subaru's, and then, she took him into her violet eyes,

Emilia: "Subaru. To a Spiritual Arts user, promises are..."

Subaru: "Super important, right? I've learned my lesson, and I've become painfully aware of that. So I'll never break another promise with Emilia-tan again. Also, I'll try to keep my promises with other people too, if possible. I hope you can accept that."

Emilia: "Hmm, I suppose I'll have to."

A smile emerged on Emilia's face. And, after making sure of this, Subaru straightened up his legs, did a big stretch, turned around, looked up, and raising both his hands up into the air,

Subaru: "Al—right, let's get this show on the road! Destination, Arlam Village! Total travelers, forty-four! This is a great migration we're doing here, I'll be counting on all of you from here on!"

A series of cheers went up in response to Subaru's shouting, and, just like this, the great migration got underway.

—After the hard-won victory at the negotiations, the released hostages embarked upon the road leading back home.

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After he concluded his conversation with Garfiel, while watching over the stricken Emilia in her sleep, Subaru came to the decision that he would accept Garfiel's condition, and negotiate to release the hostages from the Sanctuary.

Once he had put Emilia to bed, Subaru waited for everyone to wake before gathering all the key players into Ryuzu's house, where he planned to put forth his proposal.

Given the battle of words he had with Garfiel, he had expected a fair amount of resistance— But, in reality, Ryuzu did nothing but agree with him the whole time. Rather than oppose him, she had even offered several additional concessions. The result was that everything had gone exactly as he envisioned, but still, he couldn't quite shake the feeling that it was different from what he expected.

Later, when Emilia woke up, he explained to her everything that had happened, and then gave the same explanation to the refugees inside the Cathedral. The villagers were surprised and skeptical at first, but when they understood that they would be allowed to return home safely, Subaru was happy to see them overjoyed.

Although Subaru was the reason they ended up in this situation in the first place, once he announced they would be allowed to leave, all the villagers showered their gratitude upon him, which was rather embarrassing. And after all of that, it was finally time to put the plan into action.

Otto: "But I have to say, this was pretty unexpected."

The one who said this was Otto, who was holding the reins beside Subaru.

Just like on the way to the Sanctuary, their dragon carriage was drawn by the ground dragons, Patrasche and Frufoo, only, this time, Subaru was sitting next to Otto on the driver's bench.

Subaru: "Nnnuh?"

Otto: "You were asleep just now, weren't you?"

Subaru: "I was just deep in thought, and don't say that like I was hiding something or anything. Anyway, I was only half-unconscious, so I didn't hear what you said. So what were you saying?"

Otto: "If you're going to cover things up, at least have the courtesy to see it through to the end... At any rate, I was trying to say this current development was pretty unexpected."

As usual, the back and forth between Subaru and Otto was all over the place. Perhaps because Otto had already gotten used to Subaru's antics, he didn't react as dramatically as before, but merely gave a perfunctory nudge at their surroundings to indicate what he was talking about.

Otto: “I didn’t think they’d let them go this easily. We merchants have a saying, «You should keep hold of all the weaknesses you can in case you have use for them later».”

Subaru: “Is that really a merchant’s expression? You sure that didn’t come from some corrupt Edo-period magistrate? My impression of your profession just became way way way way shadier. What do you have to say for yourself?”

Thinking back, Subaru had very few memories of Otto ever acting like a merchant. There was only the one time when he made the unsubstantiated claim that he had bought too much oil, when in fact, it was entirely possible he was just a pyromaniac. Even now, the background of this so-called merchant was quite suspect.

Otto: “What’s with those eyes looking at me like I’m someone suspicious?”

Subaru: “That’s because I am looking at someone totally suspicious here. Are you really a merchant? I don’t think I’ve ever seen you do anything merchant-y in front of me.”

Otto: “Weren’t you the one who forced me, against my will, to file those documents and ledgers loaded to the brim with confidential information!? Are you suffering from amnesia!?”

Subaru: “No, that could simply be your clever attempt to convince someone who thought you were a spy that you really are a merchant. Thinking about it that way, you’re far more likely to be an enemy agent...”

Otto: “With that kind of ridiculous logic, it’d be easier for me to become a God than try to convince you of my innocence, Natsuki-san.”

Subaru: “Hey, Patrasche, did you hear that? This guy sitting next to me just said he thinks he can become a God... I’m a bit worried about my safety.”

Otto: “Huh? Dammit! Why did you have to... Aaah! Now even Patrasche-chan is looking at me with a look of pity! Please stop it already!”

Responding to Subaru’s voice, Patrasche made a short cry. Hearing this, Otto fell into despair and hugged his head with his hands. That seemed to have been Patrasche offering her own input about Otto. In times like these, one might prefer not to have the Divine Protection of the Soul of Language. It was then, that,

Garfiel: “Y’fools don’t change no matter where y’go do’ya?”

Garfiel, who was running alongside their dragon carriage, interjected himself into the conversation.

The dragon carriages were traveling down an animal path through the middle of the forest, so they weren’t at top speeds. Even if Subaru had been sprinting with all his strength, he wouldn’t have managed to keep up with their current pace, but Garfiel was easily able to catch up, and accompany the winding carriages of refugees.

Not even short of breath, Garfiel was kicking off the ground and leaping great distances with each stride.

Garfiel: “Y’know, y’got the charm o’ someone straight outta «The Tale of th’End of Bakimu the Horse Wrangler».”

Subaru: “Aren’t idioms supposed to be short and clear ways to express your meaning to whoever you’re talking to...? It doesn’t even feel like we’re having the same conversation here.”

Garfiel: “Huh? What ya try’n to say, y’bastard?”

Garfiel crimped up his nose in annoyance, and Subaru simply shrugged at that carnivorous expression, saying “Come to think of it”,

Subaru: “You volunteered to guide us out, but I don’t see you doing much guiding. Aren’t you kinda shirking on your duties?”

Garfie: “Didn’t want it t’be like this. But y’fella’s ground dragons’re pretty smart, aren’ they? They only walked this road once but they’re remeberin’ it perfectly.”

Subaru: “Well, that’s only to be expected of my girl Patrasche. This is just beginner stuff for her. Stuff like leaping through a hoop of fire, balancing on a ball, or even riding a unicyc— Hey wait, Patrasche-san, why’re you swerving around!?”

In response to Subaru’s outrageous claims about her acrobatic abilities, Patrasche began expressing her displeasure by running in zigzags. Subaru, gluing himself to his seat, started making a scene aboard the carriage. Observing this display, Garfiel snorted “What in th’hell are you doin’?”, and then, looking toward Otto who was trying to hang onto the reins,

Garfiel: “Lil’bro here said somethin’ interestin’ just now. Somethin’ ’bout bein’ «Profitable t’be grabin’ yer opponents where he’s weak»?”

Otto: “Yeah, I do think it’s true. Not that I personally believe it’s a good way of thinking, but...for instance, the more hostages you have at your disposal, the more options you give yourself for how to use them, right? Like, if you want to create a sense of danger, the more hostages you have, the more options you’ll have to...”

Subaru: “Oyoyoy! There’s some serious doubt whether this «little bro» is legitimately a merchant here. He’s definitely the kind of guy who’s committed some horrible atrocities and was forced to flee a country somewhere!”

Otto: “Why are you so convinced I’m some kind of criminal!?”

“I wonder why Otto always manages to fall right into those”, Subaru tilted his head, thinking. Then, to get the conversation back on track, “Anyhow”, he started again,

Subaru: “For the time being, basically, it’s because I already talked it over with Garfiel beforehand and decided to accept his condition... That’s why the rest of it went so smoothly.”

Otto: “Accept... your condition?”

Since Subaru didn’t seem to want to talk about it, Otto raised the question to Garfiel instead. Garfiel grinned with his canine fangs, before opening his mouth to speak,

Garfiel: “Simple, ain’t it? Instead of the crybaby Princess-sama, our boy Subaru’ll be finishin’ the rest’of the Trials and liberate the Sanctuary right’n quick.”

Otto: “That’s...”

Otto widened his eyes at Garfiel’s words, before shooting a sidelong glance at Subaru. Then, after opening and closing his mouth a few times, mumbling incoherently,

Otto: “Are you sure that’s alright, Natsuki-san?”

Subaru: “What do you mean «alright»?”

Otto: “You’re already taking the Trials, so that’s not the issue... But I suppose what I mean to ask is if it’s alright to just take away Emilia-sama’s part in the whole thing.”

That was Subaru’s dilemma as well. Although Otto had struggled to get the words out, he had cut to the heart of the matter. Subaru frowned, but Otto continued to push the issue,

Otto: “Of course, I have no idea what the Trials would entail, and I understand Emilia-sama’s isn’t doing very well. But, if Emilia is to win the Royal Selection, she needs the support from the people of the Sanctuary and the Roswaal domain, right? This is her chance to get both at once, and I don’t know if throwing that away so soon is...”

Subaru: “It’s time... We don’t know how long it will take. If, in the meantime, her base collapses from underneath her, that would be the perfect definition of putting the cart before the horse. More important than that is Emilia herself...”

Otto: “You think she’s at her limit, then? I would disagree. I’ve only known her a short time, but I think Emilia-sama’s made of some tough stuff. Sure, right after she came out of the First Trial, she was pretty out of sorts, but other than that she’s been able to keep herself together pretty well, don’t you think?”

Upon hearing Otto’s perspective, Subaru bit down hard on his lip.

It’s true that from Otto’s point of view, it must look like that Subaru was selling her short.

—But, what Otto didn’t see, was that she had been putting all her effort into just keeping up appearances whenever there was anyone besides Subaru around her.

Just like when she was sending him off at the start of their present journey. Whenever a third-party was involved, she seemed to be able to maintain the same calm demeanor as always.

On the other hand, when it was just her and Subaru alone, the facade would fall away, and she would return to the miserable state Subaru had found her in that morning. She depended on Subaru, and her true state was not something anyone else could see.

Seeing Subaru holding his tongue, Otto wanted to continue speaking. But it was someone else who interrupted him,

Garfiel: “That’s ‘nuff. We’re ‘bout to pass through the barrier o’ the Sanctuary. I can’t go no further than that.”

Subaru: “...Just out of curiosity, but, what would happen if you tried to force yourself through the barrier?”

Garfiel: “Haven’t tried it so I wouldn’t know, but I imagin’it’d be similar to when your Princess-sama lost consciousness. But it doesn’ matter either way.”

Glad that the topic changed, Subaru jumped right on it, while Garfiel turned his head, and leaped into the air. Without a sound, he nimbly landed on the luggage compartment of Subaru’s dragon carriage, and pointed a finger at the two on the driver’s bench who were looking back over their shoulders.

Garfiel: “Accordin’ to the condition, after you drop ‘em off, you just turn right around and get your asses back here... Ah, well, that lil’bro next to ya don’t matter though.”

Otto: “Stop joking around, of course I’m coming back. After all, I still haven’t even gotten an audience with Margrave Mathers yet!”

Subaru: “Oh? Really? You still haven’t introduced yourself?”

Otto: “That’s right! I’ve been asking for a week, but no matter what time I come Ram-san tells me «Your timing is inconvenient» or «He’s resting»... and keeps chasing me away!”

Angrily breathing out his nostrils with his shoulders huffing up and down, maybe Otto truly had divinely bad luck when it came to timing, but—

Subaru: “Well, that was probably on purpose. Ever since the Trials started, they’ve been giving me some half-assed excuses to not let me see him too.”

Subaru mumbled his own guess under his breath.

After they had begun the Trials, Subaru had barely seen Roswaal at all. Always standing in between them, Ram had been rebuffing Subaru exactly as she had rebuffed Otto. On the surface, it was all for Roswaal’s recuperation, but that was obviously just a pretense.

In fact, it seemed that ever since Subaru first told him that he had taken the Trial, Roswaal stopped taking any visitors.

Subaru couldn't forget the change in Roswaal's expression when he heard that Subaru had passed, and Emilia had failed. At least, it was the first time he had ever seen such an expression from him before.

For just a brief moment, that carefree look on that painted clown-face fell away, and beneath it – was an emotion that was neither fury nor sorrow, but something more complicated altogether.

Garfiel: "Don't put t'much thought into it, yeah? Anyway, when yer comin' back just use the same road. This time I'll pay 'ttention so I don't attack ya, but don't forget the password."

Subaru: "Password?"

Garfiel: "Long as ya say the words when crossin' th' barrier, nobody will be assailin' ya, got it? The password is «Baira Baira below th'Grimoire»."

Subaru: "Huh, what? "Baibai to the grime"?"

That was the worst password ever, using a completely incomprehensible idiom. Subaru scowled. It was immediately obvious who came up with this password.

Garfiel just stood there looking smug as it was all natural, while Otto was bewilderedly writing down the passphrase on a memo. Leaving the task of remembering important things to Otto, Subaru gave a long sigh, and,

Subaru: "Anyway, long as we say that we can come back in, no questions asked, right?"

Garfiel: "I ain't the only one who's on patrol, y'know. There're others more hot-blooded than I am. From their point o' view, that migh' be the perfect time to take ya out and stop ya from completin' the Trials."

Subaru: "...I do remember you saying something like that."

Ryuzu was at the head of the faction that wanted to be liberated from the Sanctuary. But there was also the other opposing faction that wanted to stay.

Garfiel's warning, then, was telling them not to let their guard down and give the other faction a chance to take advantage of their carelessness.

Subaru: "Ok, gotcha. Thanks for all the ways you've been looking out for us... I guess there's no reason to say goodbyes, since we'll be seeing each other again in half a day or so. But, thanks anyway."

Garfiel: "Jus' followin' orders from the old hag, I don't care one way or the other. More import'ntly, well uh..."

When Subaru thanked him, Garfiel waved his hand to dismiss him, but his words trailed off toward the end. Seeing something quite uncharacteristic from him, which Subaru furrowed his brows. And then, Garfiel finally continued "Uuuh",

Garfiel: "When y'get back to the mansion, is that Frederica girl gonna be there?"

Subaru: "Yeah, she should be. Speaking of which, its sounds like you know her somehow. What's up with that?"

Garfiel: "We've got a complicated relationship, that's all. Nothing I really wanna talk about, it's just..."

Subaru: "I'll tell her that you're totally thinking about her. Maybe she'll even have a message for you too."

Garfiel: "...I ain't askin' you t'..."

Suddenly averting his eyes, as if to get away from Subaru's smirk, Garfiel jumped right off the carriage. And, as he landed on the ground, the train of dragon carriages passed through the barrier between the Sanctuary and the Forest. Putting both of his hands on his waist, Garfiel sent them off, shouting,

Garfiel: "Don't even think' of runnin' away, Subaru! Y'better keep your promise even if it kills ya! That was my one condition for lettin' you outta here!"

Subaru: "Yeah, no worries on that count. My promise-keeping *udemae*⁷⁴ been super buffed lately!"

⁷⁴ Engrish flip. Means "ability/skill" (腕前), originally "パワ"(power).

Letting these words of farewell resound throughout the forest, with a smile, Subaru raised up a fist at the distant figure. And Garfiel matched it by pumping up his own fist in response.

Watching as the caravan vanished into the shadows of the forest, Garfiel continued standing there with his fist raised up in the air.

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—After passing through the barrier and coming out of the forest, they didn't encounter any problems on the rest of the road.

If nothing got in the way, the journey from the Sanctuary to the mansion should take about eight hours. They stopped twice to rest, but since the villagers were eager to return to their homes, they kept their breaks short and forced themselves to continue.

So, all in all, it was only eight hours later when the refugees returned to Arlam Village. Having departed early in the afternoon, when they arrived, it was already several hours after the shroud of night covered over the world.

Subaru: "My butt hurts from all that sitting... But that wasn't too bad."

Getting off from the dragon carriage, and giving his waist a twist, Subaru breathed a sigh of relief.

All around the village in the night, voices of rejoicing and reunion sprung up, and there were even a few shedding tears of joy in their midst. Considering the calamities that had assailed this village, Subaru decided that it was not an overreaction after all, and that no one could really ridicule them for that.

For the first time in several days, with the return of the rest of the villagers, Arlam Village came to life in spite of the night. The villagers who had mostly wallowed in gloom inside the Sanctuary now all showed the same smiles on their faces.

And the other half who had waited for them in the village, were finally relieved to see their family safely returned to them.

Otto: "Natsuki-san, are we heading back right away?"

While Subaru watched over the bustling crowd from a distance, Otto scampered over after looking around for him.

Allowing Otto to catch his breath, Subaru shook his head with a “Nah”,

Subaru: “There’s no rush, we can take a little break before heading back. Besides, I should stop by the mansion to explain everything to Frederica and Petra.”

Otto: “Aah, that’s right. I mean, I also have some things I need to discuss with my fellow merchants.”

Subaru: “Discuss what with your fellow merchants?”

Otto pointed to the owners of the six dragon carriages standing at the side.

They had been hired to evacuate the villagers, but wound up with the misfortune of getting imprisoned in the Sanctuary along with them. Now that they were freed, they were, above all, relieved, but their gazes toward Subaru were,

Subaru: “I must be imagining this, but, isn’t this supposed to be a parallel world? Why do I get the feeling their eyes all have dollar signs in them?”

Otto: “Back when we were hired, the condition was the purchase of our goods as well as additional compensation to be negotiated later. So I’d like to come to a consensus on how much compensation we’ll actually demand. I won’t be proposing anything outrageous, of course, but seeing that they’ve been burdened with the hostage situation... It might get a little pricey, so be prepared.”

Subaru: “Well, it’s not like it’ll be my wallet getting plundered. As long as you use appropriate discretion, it wouldn’t be too bad to see Ros-chi’s face go pale every once in a while?”

Otto: “That’s my Natsuki-san! You understand!”

Clapping his hands, Otto happily strutted over to his fellow merchants.

Hearing the good news brought by Otto’s triumphant return, the merchants’ cheers resounded through the village in the night. Somehow, Subaru got the feeling their celebrations sounded even happier than the villagers having their reunions, but he decided to consciously put it out of his mind, and straightened himself up.

In any case, there shouldn't be any problems in the village for now. Otto will take care of the merchants' demands, and Roswaal will end up dealing with it. Somewhat looking forward to see what expression will come on Roswaal's face when he gets hit with the bill, Subaru headed towards the mansion.

After walking fifteen minutes from Arlam Village — At the end of his path stood the lonely Roswaal mansion.

In the dark of night, only the mansion's lights asserted their existence within its shadowy contours, lending the place an eerie aura from the distance, in the hours after sunset.

Subaru remarked on this as he stood before the front gates, absentmindedly staring at the mansion. Naturally, the majority of the mansion's lights were out, and there were only light flowing out of the entry hall and the servant's rooms. As well as a room on the highest floor — Which, surely, must be Roswaal's office.

Subaru: "Otto sorted all the paperwork, but over the week it must have piled up again."

Frederica, being the all-powerful maid that she is, wouldn't have lost to Otto when it came to managing paperwork, but that wasn't the only task she had to take care of. Even with Petra's assistance, maintaining the entire mansion required a considerable amount of effort.

From the fact that she was still working away in the office in the middle of the night, one could imagine the immensity of her duties.

Subaru: "One way or another, I'll pull that Otto even deeper into this and work him like a mule as the Emilia-faction-paperwork-machine. I'll make him the official office robot."

While thinking of plots to trap that young man in the village with loose cheeks and dreams of big money, Subaru pushed open the gates and entered the mansion grounds.

Heading to the entryway, he struck the door with the falcon-shaped knocker,

Subaru: "Apologies for the late-night visit. I'm here from the Fire Department."

Sending sharp knocks ringing throughout the night, Subaru shouted out an appropriate call as usual.

Speaking of which, how do the people in this world handle fires and disasters, anyway? Subaru tilted his head, wondering about this pointless question. But,

Subaru: “There’s no reply.”

And here he thought Frederica would swoop in to respond, swift like the wind, but seeing that was not the case, Subaru dropped down his shoulders. After a little while longer, Subaru decided that no one was coming and abandoned waiting. Then, grandly pushing open the door,

Subaru: “Ooooooooooy, I’m hooome. Food! Bath! Bed!”

And, shouting these three orders like he owned the place, Subaru struck out a pose. But there was still no reply.

Tasting the nostalgic sensation of sliding along the floor in awkward silence all by himself, Subaru headed up the stairs — to the servant quarters to look for Petra.

Subaru: “Frederica’s probably in the office. I’ll go find Petra first... Then, I’ll have to look for Beako too.”

One by one, the three people who remained behind in the mansion surfaced in Subaru’s mind. Regardless of the precocious Petra or the politely insolent Frederica, the reunion Subaru had to prepare for was the one with that drill-haired loli.

Last time, the way they parted was indeed a way to part.

Without giving him a single answer to his vital questions, she had chased him out, sobbing, with an expression full of sadness.

Subaru: “I’ll have to apologize... But it’ll be kind of weird. I feel like I didn’t really do anything wrong...”

Even so, Subaru got the feeling that something would be different if he met her again and talked.

Besides, he’d like to think that he must have advanced a little by saying farewell to his past. With his current state of mind, perhaps he would be able to face her a little differently than last time. And so,

Subaru: “The first time was only a skirmish... Well that’s one way of thinking about it.”

Subaru gave the door a knock, and immediately swung it open as if to surprise the person inside, but he dropped his shoulders once again.

Walking in on a delightfully-embarrassing-outfit-changing-time was not something he was hoping for considering the target was a little girl, but no such thing happened, since there was no one in the room.

It was a room decorated to Petra's tastes, adorned with cute little items, and kept tidy and organized — but its owner was nowhere to be found. Inside the room lighted by the crystal lamps, Subaru tilted his head,

Subaru: "Going out without turning off the lights doesn't seem like something a dependable girl like Petra would do... If she isn't here, maybe she's in the office studying?"

It was possible, if the spartan Frederica was involved.

In addition to the chores, she might be teaching Petra office work as well to turn her into another all-powerful maid. It would be a great help, but since Petra was already overtaking Subaru in the domestic duties, if she overtook him in office work as well, Subaru will have no hole to crawl into.

Subaru: "Nonono, she can't even do all her arithmetic yet, I still have the advantage! Don't you underestimate the modern Japanese compulsory education!"

Muttering this while flying up the stairs, heading to the highest floor — he arrived at a double door in the dead center of the hallway, and, clearing his throat again, he knocked.

The heavy sound echoed outward, and surely it was sent into the room. But there was no reply.

Subaru: "——"

It was all too strange. Subaru's accumulated wariness so far was now raised to a whole different level. Trying to cover up that feeling with some lighthearted humor, Subaru swept his gaze down the hallway from end to end, and then, at the office door itself. He leaned his ear against the door to listen to what was inside, but no sound came through the thick, heavy door. There was nothing else he could gather if he continued to stay outside.

—Petra’s room showed no sign of being disturbed. It was neatly arranged, and her bed had been made as if she was just getting ready to sleep.

It was the same for the mansion, at least on the surface, and there seemed to be nothing out of place. Cleaned and organized with a thoroughness that could only belong to Frederica, there was not a speck of dust left on the windowsills.

So, Subaru’s wariness was only elevated because he hadn’t seen either of the girls.

Subaru: “———Hu.”

He lightly pushed on the doors, and they opened without a sound.

The next moment, light flooded out from the room into the hallway, and relying on that light, Subaru scanned the room’s interiors. There was an ebony desk, and a leather chair. From the direction of the bookshelves on the wall, a wind came blowing through — The windows were closed. But he could feel a cold wind was blowing. Intuitively, he knew that something was strange.

Sliding over the floor as he sneaked into the room, Subaru followed the direction of the wind—and saw it.

The bookshelf in the back of the room had been shifted sideways, revealing a usually hidden door installed into the wall. Beyond it, was a spiral staircase that extended downwards, far, far beyond sight—

Subaru: “Right. There was a hidden passage here. I remember, I remember.”

It happened in a previous loop.

Despairing after the villagers of Arlam had been slaughtered at the Witch Cult’s hands, and after finding Rem and Ram’s corpses in the estate, when his mind was an inch away from shattering, Subaru arrived here. Then, passing through this hidden passage into the undergrounds, there—

Subaru: “I was frozen by Puck, I think.”

There was no way to be sure. But he clearly remembered the frozen bodies of the Witch Cultists who must have pursued Emilia into the same passage, as well as his own similar end, and the Return by Death that followed.

After that, without placing much importance on this detail, he had forgotten to even verify the existence of this underground passage,

Subaru: “But why is it now...”

If it was being used, at least it meant there was a need to evacuate.

As for who might have used it, it could only someone within the Mansion who knew of this passage’s existence, probably Frederica. If she and Petra escaped through this passage, that would be the simplest explanation. But the question is,

Subaru: “What, were they running from?”

As intelligent as Frederica is, she must have had considerable reasons to make this decision.

Since there was no sign of an attack inside the mansion, she must have detected the imminent danger beforehand. Thinking to this point, the words “Witch Cult” flashed across Subaru’s mind, but he immediately shook his head and drove off that thought,

Subaru: “If that were the case, it’d be too unnatural for Frederica to not leave a single note. Besides, the villagers in Arlam didn’t notice anything either... If it was something as dangerous as the Witch Cult, she would have done something to prevent the villagers from getting caught up in it.”

At least, Frederica’s support for the Roswaal-backed Emilia was not in question. If so, then she would have done her best to take the optimum measures to handle this situation. If the villagers didn’t know about this, then it couldn’t have been the Witch Cult. In any case,

Subaru: “Frederica and Petra probably already left the Mansion... Then, I’ll—”

For a moment, Subaru was about to enter the passage to meet up with Frederica and Petra, but what stopped in his tracks was the girl whose name hadn’t occurred to him of up to now.

If Frederica had judged beforehand that they must leave the mansion, surely, they would have taken Rem along as well.

On the other hand, there was also,

Subaru: “As far as I know, Beatrice isn’t the kind of kid who can read the mood.”

There was also that impudent drill-haired loli, who certainly would have refused Frederica’s proposal.

She would have shut herself off inside the Forbidden Library, and made a fuss insisting that she will be fine no matter what, and kicked aside all their worries and concerns, and, at last, without a doubt, she would have sat there alone with a lonely expression on her face. Because he knew this without a doubt,

Subaru: “I’ll pull her out...!”

If nobody else could bring her out, then Subaru will do it himself. It doesn’t matter how firmly she believes in the safety of her own fortress.

Knowing that danger was closing in on this place, there was no way he could leave a little girl behind.

Subaru: “And since I’ve made up my mind about that—!”

Turning his back to the hidden passage, Subaru took a sharp breath, and dashed out of the office.

The most sure-fire way to find Beatrice would have been to open every single door in the mansion from end-to-end, but, for Subaru, somewhere along the way, he’d just somehow get the feeling that a door would be the one. And sure enough, he would see her on the other side. So, starting from the doors on the uppermost floor—

Subaru: “T—tt?”

The foot he just swung out in his stride tangled onto something, and Subaru rolled onto the floor.

A rather embarrassing start was the first thing that came to mind. Stumbling over right after acting cool was not quite what he was aiming for.

Pushing his hands onto the hallway carpet, Subaru turned around to see what he tripped on. And he saw, a little in front of the door to the office, something had dropped on the floor.

It was pink, and very long, and stretched on for several steps all the way to Subaru's feet. Following on from there, if you asked just where it would end, it wouldn't be very difficult to guess.

—It was something that had spilled out the side of Subaru's opened belly.

Subaru: “—Ha?”

The left side of his jacket had been cleanly sliced through, and his pink entrails were spilling out from the gap.

They trailed all the way from the door to Subaru's feet, tangling them up. In other words, somewhere along the way, his stomach had been cut open without him realizing it, or something along those lines.

Subaru: “...Ough—”

The moment he took this in, chunks of clotting blood rose in his throat, choking him, as his vision became painted with red.

He tried using his fingers to push the organs that spilled out due to his abdominal pressure back into the gap that was pushing it out, but, running out of strength, his knees collapsed from under him. Unable to hold up his body, he sprawled onto the floor.

He couldn't understand what had happened to him. Surely, he had just started running...

???: “—Didn't I tell you? Didn't we promise?”

Suddenly, he heard a voice.

In front, above the fallen Subaru's head, someone was speaking.

He lacked the strength to raise his head. His consciousness was desperately trying to pull back the overflowing intestines, the gushing blood, and the world that was drawing away.

His body heat was rapidly dropping. With every cough, the blood clots jamming in his throat splashed onto his face, and, with eyes that were starting to blur, Subaru desperately tried to hold onto this world.

“This is the end”, his intuition told him.

Somewhere in his heart, he understood this, but “Subaru cannot end like this”, he scolded back.

If he didn’t learn anything, he cannot let it end. Just one thing, anything, don’t let it end until you’ve learned something. Something, something something something something something—

The footsteps sent out ripples. A black shadow was standing in the center of the corridor stained red by chunks of his blood.

Black clothes. Slender. Black hair. Looking down on him lovingly, with those lustful eyes.

Running these through his mind, and remembering the tactile sensation of having his belly sliced open, Subaru understood.

It wasn’t the Witch Cult, but a genuine threat, nonetheless. It was—

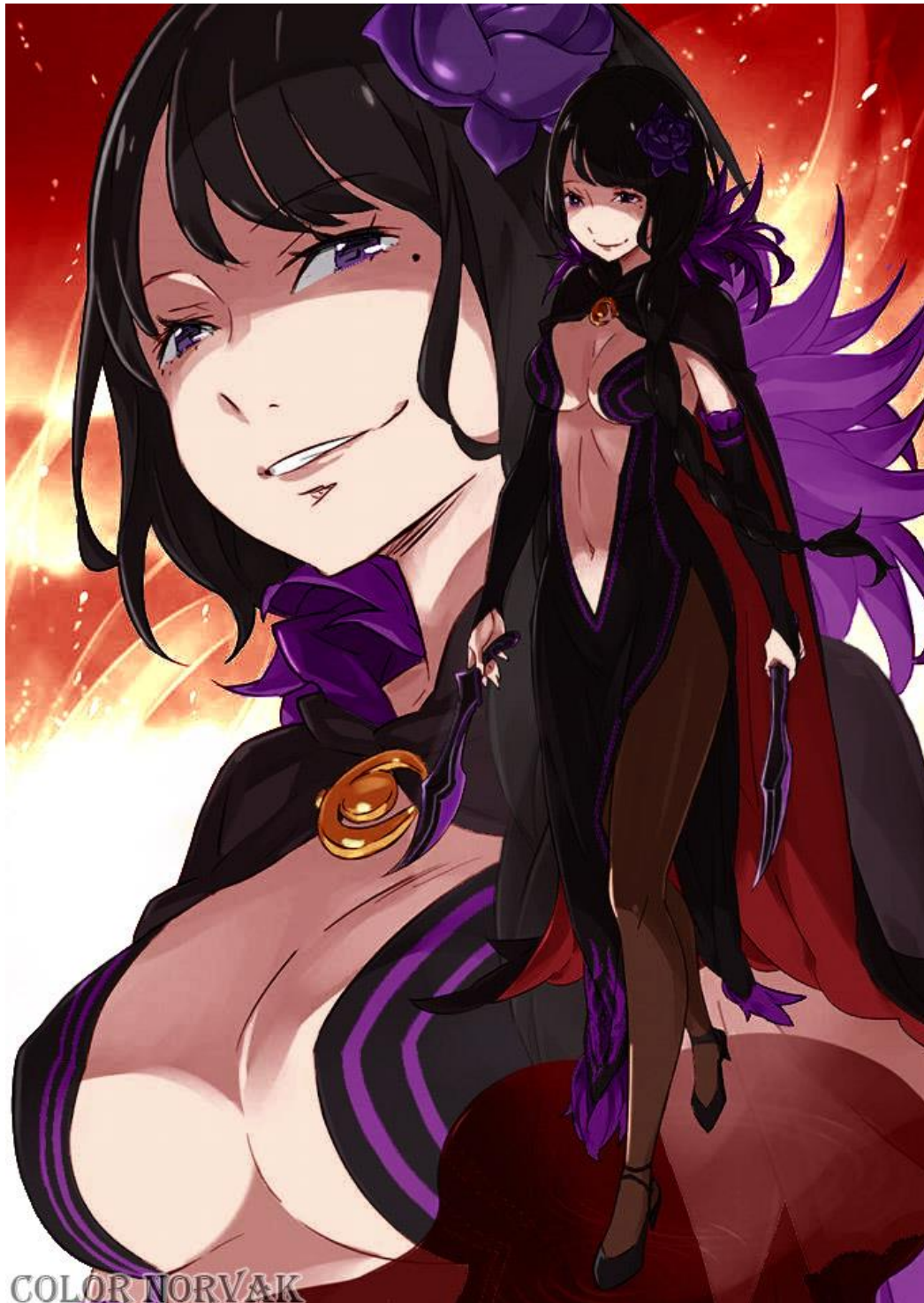
Elsa: “That until the next time we meet, you should take good care of your bowels?”

A deviant declaration of love. Subaru certainly caught it — as his consciousness began to fade.

Fading, fading, fading, darkening, darkening, until.

Everything vanished in the end — and started over again.

—The curtain has risen on the fourth loop of death.



COLOR NORVAK

Illustration from Volume 10, coloring by Norvak ([source](#))

Character Pages for Volume 10



スバルの両親というものが一目で
分かるようにデザインしてみました。
本文を読んでこの2人の事が
大好きになりました！

オウカ
エンタウ

Characters

Re: Life in a different world
from zero

Characters

Re: Life in a different world
from zero

The only ability I got in a different world "Returns by Death"
I die again and again to save her.

フレデリカ

Frederica

ロズワール邸の先輩メイド。
メイドとして完璧な家事技能を備えている
有能な使用人。



ガーフィール

Garfiel

聖域の守り手。だが口調は乱暴で、
短気で短絡的な行動に出がち。



Web Novel Volume 11



Arc 4 Chapter 24 - False Start

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 11, Chapter 1 “Maid, Maid, Maid”, Parts 1-2 (first half)

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

The very first sensation that cut into Subaru’s consciousness was one of discomfort.

Subaru: “Uech! Oueh! Upuegch!”

Feeling the strange foreign-body-sensation of chewing on gravel accompanied by a bitter earthy-taste dancing around on his tongue, Subaru immediately went into a coughing fit trying to spit the stuff out, when he opened his eyes.

He could see only darkness and felt as if a cold touch was running across his entire body. Judging from the hard sensation he felt, and the direction in which gravity was pulling him, he determined that he was lying sideways on the ground. Then, slowly looking around with eyes that were just growing accustomed to the dark— He realized that he was inside the old ruins he had seen many times before.

Subaru: “I’m, inside the Tomb?”

As if to make sure, he gave his mouth a swirl. The taste left over from spitting out gravel was still fresh in his memory.

Last time, too, he remembered waking up with pebbles in his mouth. In other words, the point in time must be,

Subaru: “Just after the First Trial, then...? So I came back here... No, more importantly...”

If this was really right after returning from the First Trial where he had made peace with his past, then Subaru wouldn’t be the only one who had collapsed here,

Subaru: “—Emilia!”

Right away, in the darkness, he found the silver-haired girl collapsed beside him.

Approaching her, and seeing the same agonized expression as last time, just as he was about to extend his finger to touch her sleeping cheeks, Subaru hesitated.

Having already accompanied and watched over Emilia several times as she took the Trials, Subaru knew. That if she was touched in her sleeping state, regardless of what was happening in the Trial, it would be interrupted, and she would be returned here.

As such, it’s even possible that she could be woken up right when she was about to pass the Trial. Therefore, he had to be very careful about touching her while inside the Tomb. But,

Subaru: “I already know this attempt doesn’t end well...”

Shaking his head, Subaru crushed his hesitation, and burned her sleeping face into his eyes as he took her body gently into his arms. Her pained expression quickly receded, and she immediately began to wake—

Emilia: “Su... baru...?”

Subaru: “Yeah, that’s right. It’s me, Emilia-tan. Are you alright?”

Opening her eyes, Emilia called his name as if still half asleep. Subaru answered her with a reassuring smile, and waited for her to regain her bearings.

Just like this, he waited. For her to remember where she was, to take in the results of the Trial, and to begin crying like a child.

Even knowing full well that she will be breaking down in tears, there was nothing he could do, for such was his powerlessness. Whereas, in spite of it all, the girl would resolve herself will to stand up, for such was her noble purity.

All he could do was to gently cradle her to keep her from shattering, and, until she calmed, he would hold her firmly in his arms, and will not let go.

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It was after carrying the crying Emilia to Ryuzu's house, and making sure that Ram had put her to bed, that Subaru settled down and began to put everything, and his Return by Death, in order.

Ram, Otto, and the others inside all wanted to inquire about what had happened, but Subaru cut them off, saying "First, let's wait until Emilia wakes up", and so now he was alone.

Having withdrawn himself from the rest who still wanted to talk, he gazed up at the night sky outside of Ryuzu's house, allowing the wind to wash over him, while within Subaru's heart, complex calculations were taking place.

Subaru: "Still... happened again, huh..."

Touching the left side of his waist, he felt for the wound that should have been there.

A deep wound had been gouged out by a blade, where his intestines had spilled out. An opportunity to see one's own organs isn't something that happened to most people, he thought, and in that regard, he had probably surpassed most people in experience points.

Subaru: "Whether or not I'm happy about it is a different story. I don't have some kind of deviant fetish where I'd get excited at the idea of seeing my own organs... Although someone I know might."

Coming to this point, the words flashed across Subaru's mind.

???: "*—Didn't I tell you? Didn't we promise?*"

He guessed it was that glamorous woman's voice. The blood-drenched, immorally glamorous voice, the voice of an abnormal person reaching ecstasy at the sight of life draining away.

Subaru abhorred that voice, that promise, and that perversion down to his very bones.

On top of that, it was not the first time he had his belly torn open this way.

Subaru: "So here's where the «Bowel Hunter» makes her re-entry... Give me a break..."

Putting his hand on his forehead, Subaru turned up to the sky and sighed.

In the back of his eyes, he saw that beautiful woman with long jet-black hair which was the same color as his own. That murderer, wielding wicked blades, who had already ended Subaru's life twice before. The menace who had driven Subaru into a corner in the first loop, whom he had only driven away with Reinhard's aid— Elsa Granhiert.

Subaru: "I couldn't actually see her, but that was definitely Elsa. Or maybe I just don't want to believe there could be anyone else like that. Let's just stick with it being Elsa."

It felt like it had already been two months since their encounter, but in real time, it had only been less than a month. The wounds she had sustained back then were not light, but the aftereffects didn't seem to be enough to stop her from killing Subaru.

Was it because he was too easy, or perhaps she had completely healed?

Subaru: "It'll be safer to assume that she's healed. Come to think of it, the healing magic in this world seems to be able to heal pretty much anything besides death itself. Can't say how many times I would've died if... Well, I actually did die, but."

Being almost dead and then coming out alive, and being almost dead and then actually dying had both happened to him so many times that, from his standpoint, it was a bit hard to grasp exactly where he stands on this.

But either way, Subaru had concluded that it was Elsa who had attacked the mansion. With that settled, the next question would be—

Subaru: "Why was Elsa in the mansion, and what happened to Frederica and Petra?"

When Subaru arrived at the mansion, there were still some signs of regular life left behind, such as the lamps in Petra's bedroom, and the lighting in the entrance hall. Not counting the office that led to the escape tunnel, the fact that the lights were on in the other two places meant that,

Subaru: "At least we know that nothing happened before that night... Right?"

He considered whether he had come to that conclusion too hastily.

There was also the possibility that those lights were simply left on all day and that Subaru was mistaken in his conclusion that nothing had occurred until that night. However, the key to rejecting that possibility lay in the amount of time the lamps could stay on.

Subaru: “Unlike lagmite ore, the crystal lamps need to be charged up by absorbing mana from the atmosphere during the day. I know from personal experience that if you just leave them on, they won’t last half the day.”

One night, while in the middle of learning the alphabets in the mansion, the crystal lamp he had forgotten to turn off during the day suddenly went out. Subaru thought there was some paranormal phenomenon at work and made a huge fuss, and Ram would have blown him away if Rem hadn’t gently caught him, and all the while, Emilia made herself small in a corner and started trembling. Subaru still couldn’t help but smile thinking of that memory. But now was not the time to be nostalgic. So, just picking out the important part,

Subaru: “If the lights had been on during the day, it would be very odd for them to still be on at night. Thus, it should be alright to eliminate the possibility that the house was empty before that day. That means my time limit is... the sixth night. This is the night of the second day, so there are four days left. No, three and a half days.”

In terms of time, Subaru had about 84 hours remaining. Within that limited time, the task imposed upon him this time was—

Subaru: “Defend the mansion from the Bowel Hunter, or at least keep the people there safe.”

There was no way to be sure whether the girls had been able to escape before that serpent-and-spider-esque killer arrived. He didn’t know where the escape passage led, but if Frederica had escaped, they would most likely try to meet up with the master of the house, Roswaal, at the Sanctuary.

Subaru: “It could be the case that the escape passage is stupidly long and leads out to the middle of nowhere, and they escaped safely. Or...”

He didn’t want to think about it, but there was also the possibility that they hadn’t been able to escape.

Considering the gap in fighting strength between the two sides, the possibility that Subaru didn’t want to think about was more likely.

He furrowed his brows at the thought. But the fact is, from what Subaru had seen, Elsa's combat ability was certainly that high. Within his limited experience of this parallel world, he had already met some very powerful people here. If that murderer were to be judged solely on her fighting ability alone, then...

Subaru: "Stronger than Julius, but weaker than Wilhelm-san... or thereabouts. And it pretty much goes without saying... Not an opponent I can beat even if I try really hard."

Even under the best circumstances, Subaru's base stats were too weak. If one were to compare them, it would not be an exaggeration to say that their difference in strength was like comparing a cat and a tiger. The chance of him winning alone was effectively zero.

During their last exchange, in the end, it was only a massive coincidence that saved him.

Subaru: "It would be great if the invincible Reinhart could just happen to pass on by right about now, but... No matter how much of a contrived, overpowered, handsome main character he is, for him to suddenly show up at a time like this is asking a bit too much."

If this was a story Subaru was reading and the author tried to pull a stunt like that, Subaru would throw the book across the room. But since this was really happening, he would gladly welcome such an absurd development with open arms.

After giving in to the urge to entertain that escapist fantasy for a moment, Subaru chased it away with a single, quiet sigh.

Subaru: "Elsa's reason for coming to the mansion... is most likely the same as last time, to disrupt the Royal Selection. After all, she's been hired by someone to get in Emilia's way."

In the capital, Emilia's Insignia was stolen by Felt. While Elsa was the one who hired Felt, the real mastermind was the one who had hired Elsa. By following the clues as to who would steal an Insignia from Emilia that qualified her for the Royal Selection, Subaru had once believed that it must be one of the other factions, but,

Subaru: "After seeing the other candidates... I don't think I can be so sure."

First, looking at it from the angle of someone dispatching an assassin to steal an Insignia---

Right from the start, Crusch could be taken out as a suspect. Having witnessed her heroic character first-hand, Subaru could guarantee that without a second thought. She was not the kind of person who would do such a thing.

Felt was naturally not a suspect either, so that left only Priscilla and Anastasia, but—

Subaru: “Priscilla... Would that haughty young lady really have a thing for cloak-and-dagger stuff? I could be mistaken, but she seems to be the kind of person who believes the whole world revolves around her. I don’t think she’d go out of her way to do something like this. Then that just leaves Anastasia...”

The purple haired merchant girl came to mind.

Underneath her gentle appearances, was the sheen of a sharp-nosed hunter, and an awareness of her surroundings that would allow her to turn any situation to her advantage. In fact, Subaru had made good use of that characteristic of hers.

If it really were her doing, perhaps she would have been choosing the most logical method to remove the opposition. Happily letting her imagination run wild and hiring a third party with gold to carry out some clandestine operation seemed to be her strong suit too. Only, if there was one factor that refuted that argument, it would be,

Subaru: “I just, don’t think that Julius guy would overlook something like that. No no, it’s not like I’m singling him out or anything. Right, yeah, just a gut feeling, that’s all.”

Or, perhaps she had managed to hide it from the Finest of Knights⁷⁵. But the question remains, would she really risk creating an irreparable fissure within their otherwise perfect master-servant relationship?

In the end, the theory of Anastasia’s faction’s involvement must also be rejected.

Subaru: “That accounts for all the suspects among the candidates. But even so, there is still more to think about. If we consider how people treat Emilia...”

⁷⁵ Keeping the Light Novel nomenclature; it was translated as “Greatest Knight” by TranslationChicken, and “Courtliest Knight” by SummaryAnon.

If the culprit wasn't another Royal Selection candidate, then it could be someone from a faction that simply wanted to exclude Emilia from the Royal Selection. It would make sense if someone who despised the half-elf Emilia had chosen this as the most simplistic method.

But would anyone really go that far? Subaru must be naive to even entertain such a question. The hatred for her half-elf lineage was certainly that deep.

Subaru: "But if that's true, then there's virtually no chance of figuring out who her employer is. Unless Elsa herself spits it out."

And he didn't have the power to make her — So he was right back where he started. In the end, the only possible way to deal with Elsa's attack would be,

Subaru: "It's kind of disturbing how weak our faction is. I'm completely useless. Otto doesn't even count. Emilia and Puck could put up a fight if only they were both around, and Ram's stamina becomes worrisome if we ever get into a drawn-out fight. Roswaal is injured, but it's not like he could be counted on anyways. I have no idea how strong Frederica is, but, unless maybe Petra has some kind of secret power and suddenly develops into a *mutekino shujinkou*⁷⁶... That's not gonna happen. So basically,"

Subaru could think of two viable plans.

The first was to go back to the mansion, get Frederica, Petra, Rem, and Beatrice and escape to the Sanctuary to avoid Elsa's attack.

The other option was,

Garfiel: "—What're ya wastin' yer time out here fer?"

Coming out of the house, Garfiel looked down at Subaru, who was sitting on the ground leaning his back against the wall. Since he was so short, it was quite rare to see Garfiel looking down at him. Savoring the new experience, Subaru let out a "No", and shook his head,

Subaru: "I'm just putting my thoughts in order, thinking through some stuff. How's Emilia?"

⁷⁶ English flip. Means "invincible protagonist/hero" (無敵の主人公), originally "チートキャラ" (cheat character).

Garfiel: “Princess-sama’s still sleepin’ like a log. She’s sleepin’ like «Mororoku nappin’ for a whole day an’ night».”

Subaru: “I don’t know who that is, but sounds like Mororoku sleeps too much.”

Responding to the usual incomprehensible idiom, Subaru stood up and turned to face Garfiel.

Half a head shorter than Subaru, he had a head of short blond hair. Between his sharp eyes, there was a white scar on his forehead. His pointed canine teeth and his ferocious beast-like body gave off an otherworldly aura—and there was a confidence in himself which only the strong possessed.

Of the two plans that had come to mind for dealing with Elsa, the second one was this youth.

If they passed the Trials and released the Sanctuary, Subaru would be able to take him out of this place. Then, if he was as strong as he claimed to be, he would hopefully have enough strength to defeat Elsa. Rather than fleeing as a temporary measure, it would be better to repulse or even subjugate Elsa and remove the threat altogether.

Subaru: “Hey, Garfiel.”

Garfiel: “The hell y’want?”

Subaru: “You’re the strongest, aren’t you? You’re confident you’ll never lose to anyone, right?”

Garfiel: “Haa? Yer damn right. Don’t matter who it is. I’ll crush‘em, send‘em flyin’, kill‘em dead and come out on top.”

Although a bit annoyed by Subaru’s question, Garfiel’s confidence didn’t waver for a bit. Encouraged by that response, Subaru nodded,

Subaru: “Once we get you out of the Sanctuary, there’s something that’ll require that strength of yours really soon. When that time comes, we’re gonna have to rely on you to be the strongest.”

Garifel: “What ya talkin’ ‘bout?”

Subaru: “Prove to me what you told me just now, ok? I’ll be counting on you.”

Patting the confused-looking Garfiel on the shoulder, Subaru headed back into Ryuzu's house. When he opened the door and stepped in, the three people inside— Ram, Otto, and Ryuzu, all focused their sights onto Subaru. With their gazes washing over him, Subaru turned his steps toward the room where Emilia was sleeping.

Ram: "Barusu, Emilia-sama is still..."

Subaru: "Hmm, I think she's woken up by now— Emilia-tan, I know you probably don't want to come out, but we need to talk. Everyone's waiting for you."

After calling through the door, he heard the faint sound of breathing coming from the other side.

Here was a brief hesitation. Then, after a few seconds had passed, the doorknob gently turned, and the door opened, revealing Emilia timidly standing behind it with her head slumped down.

Emilia: "Um... Sorry I'm always causing you trouble. In the Tomb, and now as well..."

Subaru: "Being troubled by Emilia-tan is no trouble at all. I want to do it, so it's fine. More importantly, are you feeling heavy or hurt anywhere? If you feel strange anywhere, I'll gently rub it for you and make it all better."

Emilia: "Mm. When I fell down, I think I hit my waist or something, so it aches a little bit..."

Subaru: "Understood. I'll start to carefully... Ram-san? Ram-san? The pointy end of your wand is jamming into my liver area!?"

While Subaru was busy cracking a joke bordering on sexual harassment, Ram snuck up behind him, pulled out her wand, and jabbed him with it. When he pointed that out to her, she made no reply and only jabbed him harder, until Subaru yelped like a puppy and jumped out of the way.

Ram: "Emilia-sama, how are you feeling? Please forget Barusu's insolent remarks, and tell Ram everything about your physical condition."

Subaru: "What you're not even going to give a comment on what you did!? Look, I'm seriously kinda bleeding here. It even went through all these layers of clothes, just how much strength were you putting in?"

Subaru protested while rubbing at the jolting pain left over in his lower back. Ram only sent him a sidelong glance as if she was looking at an insect, and snorted “Hah”. Then, turning back to Emilia,

Ram: “Then you are alright, Emilia-sama? If there are no problems with your health, then...”

Emilia: “A-ahuh, I’m fine. We have to... talk about what happened during the Trial, don’t we?”

Having guessed what Ram was going to say, Emilia nodded and stepped forward into the middle of the room. Garfiel soon came in as well, and so all the usual faces now circled around Emilia.

Then, under the gazes of everyone around her, Emilia stammered out an explanation of the Trial and its outcome, just as she did last time. If there was just one difference...

Otto: “So then, how come Natsuki-san is alright after going inside?”

Otto raised his hand a little, and asked on behalf of everyone.

Until that question was raised, Subaru hadn’t explained any of the information from his side. Part of it was because he wanted to hear Emilia’s thoughts about the Trial, but also,

Subaru: “I told you, didn’t I? I got the Qualifications, so I can go inside. If you ask me where I got it from, it was probably when I went inside the Tomb yesterday afternoon. And as for what happened when I went inside... I took the same kind of Trial Emilia-tan did. But it kinda looks like I passed mine.”

Subaru’s announcement ignited an uproar throughout the room.

Emilia, who had taken the same Trial and failed, was even more shocked than everyone else. She stared at Subaru in silence, with a baffled look in her violet eyes. Subaru nodded to her, and,

Subaru: “Just to get this out of the way, the reason I passed the Trial wasn’t because I was better or anything. The Trial was about facing your past. I’ve already made peace with mine beforehand, so it was basically just a *shouyoumen*⁷⁷ for me.”

Ryuzu: “I don’t know what a «*shouyoumen*» is, but if Su-bo passed the Trial... Hmph, that’s a surprise.”

⁷⁷ Engrish flip. Means “bonus (video game) level/stage” (賞与面), originally “ボーナスステージ” (bonus stage).

Ram: “However, based on what Emilia-sama said, the Trial doesn’t end with just one stage, correct? Since the word <first> was mentioned, one would expect there to be more.”

Ram said this as Ryuzu seemed to accept it as it is. While nodding at them both, Subaru stole a glance at Emilia. She still kept her silence, and there were waves of complicated emotions carried within her eyes.

Subaru tried to imagine what she might be feeling inside her heart, but he soon shook away this naive notion. There was the time limit imposed upon him on the one hand, and the difficulty of Emilia’s Trial caused by her past on the other. Having to balance the two at once, there weren’t many options left to him. Therefore,

Subaru: “I heard something when I passed the Trial... Apparently, if two challengers go in at the same time, the next Trial won’t start. Then we’ll have to wait for a different day to go in again.”

Ram: “...Hmm, which means?”

Subaru: “If Emilia-tan and I enter the Tomb together, Emilia-tan’s Trial will start while my Trial... Basically, I won’t be able to start the Second Trial.”

Otto: “W—wa—wait a minute, Natsuki-san.”

Just as Subaru finished his sentence, Otto immediately cut himself in. Seeing Subaru pretending not to notice his unsettled gaze, he stuck his hand into his light-greyish hair, and,

Otto: “By the sound of what you just said, Natski-san, you’re planning to challenge the Trials as well? But wasn’t this whole thing supposed to set up an achievement for Emilia-sama so that...”

Subaru: “Otto, you dumbass.”

Subaru tried to stop Otto from blurting it all out, but it was too late. And Otto, realizing that he had just said something he shouldn’t have, quickly covered his own mouth. But everyone else—including Emilia, had already heard what he was trying to say.

Otto awkwardly held his breath, and Subaru stared at him with eyes of disdain. And Emilia, looking at them both from a distance,

Emilia: “What did you mean, just now?”

Subaru: “Emilia-tan, let’s calm down. That was uh...”

Emilia: “Don’t try to dupe me, tell me properly— Please, Subaru.”

Emilia’s eyes clung onto Subaru, pleading.

No boy would have had the heart to refuse a beautiful girl’s tearfully voiced plea, and he would not be Natsuki Subaru if he could refuse such a plea from Emilia. He wished he had the willpower to say no, but Subaru dropped his shoulders and abandoned his hesitation,

Subaru: “If Emilia-tan passes the Trials, the villagers of Arlam will be freed from being hostages, and the residents of the Sanctuary will be released from being confined to this land. If you could overcome the Trials, you will gain the support of both of these two camps... That was the real plan behind all this.”

Emilia: “...Is, that so. So you knew, Subaru?”

Subaru: “No no, I didn’t notice anything at all until someone told me.”

Seeing Emilia clearly shaken before him, Subaru held up his chest and brazenly lied. In front of Subaru’s shameless lie, Ram and Otto looked at him as if they were chewing on something bitter, but Subaru hinted to them to keep quiet by shooting them both a glance. Then, turning back to Emilia,

Subaru: “All of it was Roswaal’s plan. Honestly, I’m even suspecting whether his injuries are just a part of the performance.”

Emilia: “Even Roswaal wouldn’t go that... Why can’t I finish that sentence? Looking at the situation now, it does seem like something he would do.”

Subaru: “I’d hate to let everything go along with that guy’s intentions... I would be joking if I told you that was my main motivation, but that’s definitely a part of it. But more than that...”

Emilia looked confused, and lowered her head. Subaru bent down beside her to look up at her face from below, and saw her long eyelashes trembling with surprise.

Subaru: “I want to become your strength. I don’t know what you saw when you faced your past, but if it brings you so much pain, so much heartache, and so many tears... Then I want to offer you my hand.”

Emilia: “...Subaru.”

Subaru: “If the goal is to take the Trials and liberate the Sanctuary, then it’s fine if I do it. If an achievement is needed, then you can have all of mine. My achievements are your achievements. No matter who it is, everyone has a past... But nothing good comes out of believing that all of them have to be resolved.”

Last time, in the world before his death, those were the words Garfiel had said to him.

In front of Subaru, who had wanted Emilia to continue challenging the Trial even knowing the pain that facing her past would cause her, Garfiel had said this about the need to overcome the past.

That new perspective had struck Subaru like a thunder on a clear day.

Emilia widened her eyes in surprise, and bit her lips with an expression like she was sinking into thought.

Subaru understood why she would be conflicted. The truth is, deep down, she must be frightened of facing her past. But because she is so pure and noble, she wouldn’t possibly consider pushing this burden onto someone else. And it was for this reason that she was so conflicted.

There was no way to say for sure that the remaining Trials wouldn’t wound Subaru’s heart just like her past had wounded hers.

Subaru: “It’s alright if you have to think about it. I understand it’s not something you can decide right away— But if it’s alright, I hope you can at least let me have one try tomorrow.”

Emilia: “One try, tomorrow...?”

Subaru: “Either way, I can’t be the kind of devilish-instructor who drags an exhausted Emilia-tan into the Tomb like «Go take the Trials!» Since I still have plenty of energy left, I should be the one to go next, even if it’s just to do a practice-run into the Second Trial. And if I end up passing the Trial, that’s even better, isn’t it?”

If he could gain a single day, and then gain another day after that, then by passing the Trials as soon as he could, he could liberate the Sanctuary on the day after tomorrow.

He would relieve Emilia's burden, accomplish his goal, and have enough time left over to save everyone at the mansion. That would be the most ideal result.

Subaru knew that Emilia would be shaken by his proposal. It bothered him to be deceiving her at a time when she was most vulnerable, but it's a technique in negotiation to throw down a large issue first before following it up with the smaller and more vital ones.

Since her mind was still not at ease, after hesitating to accept the first one, she would not be able to bring herself to deny his proposed concessions.

Tomorrow and the day after, Subaru will pass the Trials. There will surely be another opportunity to give Emilia the time to stand back up. But that time isn't now. There isn't enough time, and the uncaring hand of fate had—

Garfiel: "Y'expectin' us to just listen quietly while y'move the conversation along any way y'like?"

Just as Subaru's improvised tactic was about to succeed, a voice stopped him from behind.

The golden-haired barrier narrowed his fierce emerald-green eyes, and, clacking his sharp canine fangs, took a step forward—

Garfiel: "I say, other than Princess... Emilia-sama, I ain't agreein' t'anyone else takin' the Trials. At least, I defin'tly defin'tly defin'tly, ain't gonna let you be th'one to free us."

Subaru: "Wha—!?"

Those were words he never expected to hear.

Subaru tried to make sense of the words that had been thrown at him, but unable to connect the speaker to the content of what was spoken, Subaru only groaned in confusion.

Watching as Subaru's eyes wavered, as if slamming down reality in front of someone who could not understand it,

Garfiel: “Y’listenin’? Do I have t’say it again? I ain’t gonna approve of anyone other than Emilia-sama takin’ the Trials. Get that into yer head, think of it as my condition, and not even the Granny’s gonna change that.”

Just like this, Garfiel crumpled up the skin of his nose, and spat this out with his displeasure in full display.

Arc 4 Chapter 25 - Forest of Ice

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 11, Chapter 1 “Maid, Maid, Maid”, Parts 2 (later half)-3
(heavily changed)

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken – [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#)

Garfiel: “Lookin’ like yer gonna cry ain’t gonna change a thing. I’ve already made up my mind. And once I do I don’t budge. It’d be like «Donmorakin gettin’ stuck when y’push him».”

Watching Subaru’s eyes open wide with astonishment, Garfiel continued. The condition he spoke of — Hearing it, threw Subaru’s heart into a state of shock and disarray. Because,

Subaru: “Of all people, why are you the one saying this...?”

Garfiel: “Huh? ‘Sit so surprisin’ I disagree? Just how naïve are ya? All we did was talk a couple times, I’d be pretty pissed if y’think y’understand me.”

At Subaru’s words, Garfiel twisted the corners of his lips with displeasure, and Subaru did the same in return.

After all, what Garfiel had just rejected was based on something that Garfiel had suggested in the first place.

In the previous world, when Garfiel could no longer stand watching Emilia getting worn down from challenging the Trials over and over, he tossed up the idea that Subaru should take the Trials in her place. Subaru, who had obstinately believed that Emilia must be the one to overcome the Trials, was shaken to his core, and, after seeing sense in that idea, he had adopted it for himself. But now,

Subaru: “I’ve got all kinds of emotions swirling inside that I can’t keep down but... I’ll forget them for now. But more importantly, why are you against it? Increasing the chances of liberating the Sanctuary can’t possibly be bad for you?”

Garfiel: “Well, so yer sayin’ if I’m fully on board with Granny’s plans, then I should know yer idea’s more efficient, that it? —But still, I just absolutely don’t like it.”

Subaru: “Why are you saying that like some snot-nosed brat...!”

Crossing his arms, Garfiel turned his face away. There was no logic to what he was saying, and the fact that he was going purely on his feelings only complicated the conversation even further.

From their interactions up to now, Subaru understood that Garfiel was emotional— Or, more accurately, that his priorities are primarily based on what he feels like at the moment. If appealing to common sense was useless, then Subaru didn’t know what else he could do would be effective.

Subaru: “Ryuzu-san...”

Since there was no point in talking to Garfiel, who had no intention of agreeing with him, Subaru called to the elderly woman in the body of a young girl who had been quietly watching their exchange. But seeing Subaru turn to her, Ryuzu only waved through her long sleeves that hid her hands underneath,

Ryuzu: “When Gar-bo’s like this, there’s nothing I can say to make him budge. It’s unfortunate, but no matter how hard you try, there’s nothing in the Sanctuary that can force him to listen. Does Su-bo want to try?”

Subaru: “I don’t have the kind of suicidal tendencies that’ll make me want to challenge a guy who can throw a dragon carriage... Damnit, what’s with you guys?”

She wasn’t approving of Garfiel’s words, but since she didn’t actively rebuke him, it probably meant that deep down she agreed with him. Chances were that Ryuzu also believed that Emilia should be the one to overcome the Trials. He didn’t know how much she respected Roswaal, but it seemed safe to assume that Ryuzu agreed with Roswaal on the most fundamental parts.

Nevertheless, Subaru couldn’t help but wonder what would happen if Garfiel was on his side.

Emilia: “...Subaru.”

Calling him with a worried voice, Emilia looked up at Subaru who seemed to be overwhelmed by feelings he couldn’t explain. Reflecting the side of Subaru’s face within her violet eyes,

Emilia: “I-I’ll try my best, so it’s fine, you don’t have to push yourself. It was a bit... Yeah, just a bit sudden, so I was surprised, but now that I know what is going to happen...”

Subaru: “No, Emilia-tan, you’re the one who shouldn’t push yourself. I’ll convince this stubborn bastard somehow. And once I do that, the Trials...”

Emilia: “Subaru y—”

Emilia seemed like she was about to give in to Garfiel’s words. Seeing her rally herself from her weakness, Subaru started churning in his head to think of some way to make them see reason. But, just as Subaru’s mental preparation was getting underway, Emilia,

Emilia: “Subaru... Even you, don’t believe I can do it?”

Subaru: “...Huh?”

Emilia: “I-I know I let you see my useless side, so now you’re thinking that... you can’t leave the Trials to me, so instead.”

Subaru: “You’re wrong. It’s not like that.”

Emilia: “Well, I know you’re worried, Subaru. Subaru passed the Trial while I didn’t even come close... I don’t even have the resolve to face... the Trial, and my past.”

Even though Subaru was denying it, Emilia shook her head from side to side, refusing to accept his denial.

Negative emotions surfaced in her eyes, and her lips shivered as her face went pale. From her unsettled speech, Subaru knew this was because she was recalling the Trial and the so-called past.

—In other words, she was at a point where she could very easily crumble.

Subaru: “You don’t have to think about it—!”

Emilia: “But unless I face it, I’ll never overcome the Trials! Yes, that’s right... I have to overcome the Trials, I have to overcome my past... or I will never become the ruler. And the villagers and the people of the Sanctuary will never be able to leave...”

Taking her by the shoulders, Subaru desperately called out to her, but Emilia shook her head and did not seem to hear him. Or rather, the more he tried to stop her, the more obstinate her will seemed to become,

Emilia: “I can’t let you babysit me forever, Subaru. I can’t. Just not long ago, Subaru got hurt so badly because of me... I, don’t want to make you carry my burden anym...”

Subaru: “It’s fine that way. This might be a bad way of putting it, but you’re already helping me as much as I’m helping you. It’s all about putting the right materials to the right uses, right? I’m the one who has the better affinity when it comes to Trials. That’s all there is to it, and nothing else. It just seems like something I can do, and something I can actually do faster. I don’t find things I’m good at very often. There’ll be plenty of opportunities for Emilia-tan to do your best later on.”

Emilia: “Isn’t this one of those huge opportunities now? If I always look away from unpleasant things, and keep running away...Tthen what will I become?”

—If only he could’ve screamed “What’s wrong about running away”.

If running away from things you don’t like, shying your eyes away from painful things, and turning your back to difficulties could allow you to live in peace, then that’s not such a bad way to live. Subaru himself had lived this way, trying to distance himself from hardships to the best of his ability.

So he knew— That even though it’s a cowardly way to live, there was no reason to condemn it.

But still, now. Right now, when Subaru should have understood and approved of the weakness facing up against Emilia’s stubborn heart—

Subaru: “———”

Why couldn’t he utter a single word of what he was thinking?

In front of Subaru’s silence, Emilia closed her eyes and turned down her face. His hands that were still on her shoulders could feel her body temperature rising as if she was having a fever, but Subaru didn’t know what he could do. And, watching their exchange,

Garfiel: “Hah. Yer free to fight it out as y’like, but listenin’ from the side, sounds to me like Emilia-sama’s got’a point? Fact is, the Trial’s been prepared to be challenged by Emilia-sama. Suddenly stickin’ yerself in’s just...”

Subaru: “You shut up! You... you don’t know anything yet...!”

Garfiel: “Huh?”

Subaru exploded at Garfiel, who made it sound so easy without realizing what kind of feeling that was going through him. Faced with Subaru’s rage, a dangerous aura began to emanate from Garfiel.

But once again, Subaru ignored his threat and glared at him fearlessly.

Subaru: “Do you have any idea what will happen if you keep pushing this on her? Do you think I can just calmly watch as she gets hurt, worn down, and falls apart...? What would I be if I...”

Garfiel: “...I don’t get where you’re coming up with this stuff all of’a sudden.”

Subaru: “You’re thinking in terms of conditions and merits, but did you think about Emilia herself even once? I know if she overcomes the Trials, the payoff will be huge. But, you’re not counting the wounds she’ll get or the tears she’ll shed to get there... or what she herself wants.”

In the previous world, even though he had seen, closer than anyone, how thin Emilia had been worn, how weakened she had become, Subaru never uttered a word to stop her.

If it’s her, if it’s Emilia, then she will be able to do it. They had cornered her, pushed her beyond her limits, and only then had they realized it. There was no point trying to explain this feeling to someone who had not experienced it.

That was the curse of Return by Death that stabbed at Subaru this moment.

His situation was that only he knew the truth of what happened in the last world. Since neither his knowledge nor his words would suffice, the only thing he could do was to speak from emotions,

Emilia: “What... do you know, Subaru?”

Subaru: “Emilia?”

Feeling a tug on his sleeve, Subaru lifted up his head and saw Emilia's eyes opened wide, staring at him. Emotions were swirling within her violet pupils, which were drowned in surging tear drops that would fall and disappear.

With tiny movements, Emilia shook her head from side to side, muttering "No, no..." as if rejecting something.

Emilia: "Do you know? Subaru, do y...do you know... about my past?"

Subaru: "Wait, calm down. Take a deep breath. The conversation's just taken a bad turn, so..."

Emilia: "Wrong, you're wrong... I didn't, mean to... I, just... just."

Once again, Emilia returned to the state she had been in within the Tomb, immediately after the Trial.

Confused, disoriented, beginning to ramble incoherently, her violet eyes that were wet with tears reflected Subaru within them, without seeing him at all. She reached out her fingers and clenched onto Subaru's sleeve as if she was going to tear it off,

Emilia: "I, Everyone... even mother, I... but no, you're wrong. It's not true. It really isn't. At the time I... really... I."

Subaru: "Emilia, what are y..."

Holding tight onto Subaru, Emilia desperately rambled on. Unable to understand the meaning behind her frantic words, Subaru could only pray that his sincere, meaningless consolation could get through to her.

When, in front of the helpless Subaru, a shadow suddenly moved. It was,

Subaru: "—Ram."

Without stopping to respond to his call, Ram slid herself behind Emilia. Reaching out her hand, she gently covered Emilia's mouth. As the silver-haired girl's eyes widened in astonishment, Ram quietly uttered "Forgive me",

Emilia: "...Ah."

And suddenly, Emilia's body began to powerlessly collapse to the floor. Immediately reaching out to Emilia who was falling right in front of him, Subaru breathed a sigh of relief as he managed to wrap her within in his arms. Then, looking up at Ram,

Subaru: "What did you do!?"

Ram: "Only a quicker way to calm her down. Did that make Barusu mad?"

Subaru: "I wanted to say it was too forceful... but I guess it was for the best. Sorry for all the trouble."

Ram: "It's strange that Barusu would be apologizing on Emilia-sama's behalf. Since when did you take over the Great Spirit-sama's position as Emilia-sama's protector?"

Subaru: "It's not like I was..."

"Trying to", was what he was about to say. But Subaru realized that it would have been an unconvincing rebuttal.

Since for one reason or another Puck was refusing to show his face, it was true that Subaru was looking out for Emilia even more than usual. And now, knowing that challenging the Trials was wearing her down, that feeling had only increased.

And for Emilia, now that the Great Spirit who had always protected her was no longer at her side, she was relying on Subaru more than ever before. In any case,

Garfiel: "If she's gotta be taken care of, the talk ends here."

Watching Subaru cradling Emilia, who had been forced asleep by Ram, Garfiel snorted and spat this out.

Subaru was about to raise his voice to object, but, feeling Emilia's small movements in his arms, he unwittingly shut his mouth. And so, having lost his chance, he did nothing more except watch as Garfiel turned his back to leave.

Garfiel: "Today's Trial's the exception. From t'morrow onwards, th' one t'take the Trials'll be Emilia-sama. I won't accept ya takin' em."

Baring his fangs, Garfiel spoke his part and left Ryuzu's house. And, the tiny shadow behind him—
Ryuzu, continued,

Ryuzu: "Sorry, Su-bo. But I'm of the same opinion. The earlier the Sanctuary is liberated the better, but... it would be more convenient to stick to Ros-bo's intentions."

Subaru: "What do you mean, it would be more convenient..."

Ryuzu: "Even if the Sanctuary is liberated, it doesn't change the fact that we will continue to be Ros-bo's subjects, under his protection. So, it would be in our best interest to avoid going against him if possible... I hope you do not think badly of me, it was not my intention to be selfish."

Realizing that Ryuzu's words must have represented the true thoughts of the residents of the Sanctuary, Subaru lost all room to object. After Garfiel and Ryuzu of the Sanctuary-camp left the room, the only ones remaining were the odd-bunch members of Roswaal's mansion, plus one extra.

Subaru: "So, plus-one-extra Otto, what do you think of this situation?"

Otto: "I got the worst feeling about where this is going and I intend to keep quiet and let this pass, so would you mind not dragging me into this...? But, if I were to give my honest opinion after listening to that conversation, I think Garfiel is right."

Otto lifted up a finger as he said this, nodding several times while watching Subaru kneel down,

Otto: "It would make more sense, whether it's for the Margrave's aims, or for Emilia-sama's as a Royal Selection candidate. I'm sure if Natsuki-san takes the Trials in her place, it could be made to become Emilia-sama's achievement, but... Regardless of how other people hear about it in the future, will the people who are currently stuck in the Sanctuary really think of it this way? And will it really win her their support?"

Subaru: "...I understand that too. No matter which way I think about it, letting Emilia be the one to liberate the Sanctuary will be most beneficial, but..."

Ram: "...but Emilia-sama is incapable of overcoming the Trials?"

Ram's words kicked right through Subaru's indecisive muttering. Yet, in front of her refreshingly blunt attitude, Subaru grew calm.

Subaru: "As far as I can tell, I think it'd be too much to expect quick results. I don't know what exactly happened in Emilia's past... but I'm sure you both understand that we don't have that kind of time, don't you?"

Ram: "At the very least, I would like to see this end within three years before the Royal Selection is decided."

Subaru: "That's being way too patient about this!"

That was probably some kind of joke, and since she said it with a straight face, he could pretty much rule out the possibility that she was being serious. As if understanding Subaru's meaning, she nodded,

Ram: "There is also the burden of the refugees, and the matter of food supplies. Looking at this in the long term, it's unrealistic to keep sustaining this many people."

Subaru: "Well, that's the gist of it. They're already stressed out as it is after being suddenly forced to evacuate. If they stop receiving enough food on top of that, their discontent will explode. And for the Sanctuary guys, there'll be no point in keeping the hostages if their own living standards start dropping because of it— At least, there'll be no point in keeping all of them."

Ram: "You think Garf will start culling the villagers?"

Ram's voice became slightly more animated as she asked this.

Subaru raised his brows at her rather unexpected reaction, and even she herself seemed to be surprised about her own attitude. But, stroking her forelocks in order to distract away from it,

Ram: "I would rather not think about it, but with Garf's personality, it is possible. If it really comes down to it, he won't hesitate to follow his own priorities."

Subaru: "He's kinda like you in that. My opinion's the same... So, I'd like to suggest that we free the hostages from the Sanctuary before that happens."

Last time, that proposal was accepted on the secret condition that Subaru would take the Trials. Since that won't work this time, he could expect it to be far more difficult to negotiate the same terms. But even so, he was sure that he could win some concessions in the end,

Subaru: "In any case, if the Sanctuary guys are going to push Emilia into taking the Trials no matter what, hopefully I can do something to make things easier for both sides."

Ram: "...I'm surprised. I thought Barusu would be more opposed to it and behave like an unreasonable little child."

Seeing Subaru apparently put away his worries about Emilia taking the Trials, Ram made this brief comment. Subaru nodded, and started off again with "Well",

Subaru: "It's regrettable and unfortunate... but it makes the most sense to go along with Roswaal's plans. Yeah, that's right. If I can overlook the fact that Emilia will be hurt, then it's definitely for the best if we do it this way."

Ram: "Even knowing that she'll be hurt, you'll let her go on with it? What a demon you are."

Subaru: "To have a real demon tell me that, I must really have changed. Except... No, nevermind."

He was about to say something, but Subaru closed his mouth again and shook his head. Seeing that he wasn't going to continue, Ram furrowed her brows, but didn't bother commenting on it.

Gently, being careful not to wake her, Subaru lifted up Emilia in his arms. She was light. People were supposed to be heavier when they are unconscious, but she was still as light as a feather.

Just how much must she be carrying within this small, delicate body, he wondered.

Subaru: "Ram. After I set Emilia down in the bedroom, I want to talk to Roswaal. Is that alright with you?"

Ram: "Roswaal-sama is resting. No one may enter his room for the time b..."

Subaru: "I want to talk to him about the Trial. We won't get anywhere if we low-ranking guys just keep talking amongst ourselves. I need the mastermind's opinion on this."

If he used the Trials as bait, then even Roswaal will have to take down the “Do Not Disturb” sign on his door and meet him face to face. Subaru already had experience of this from the previous world.

Ram closed her eyes for a moment to scrutinize Subaru’s words, until, looking as if she was very tired, she spilled out a sigh,

Ram: “I will wait at Roswaal-sama’s side. Barusu, please take Emilia-sama to her bed...without doing anything suspicious.”

Subaru: “What a thing to say when I’m in *shinken na kibun*⁷⁸. I wasn’t even thinking anything until you went and said that, and now that I am acutely aware of the soft *hada*⁷⁹ sensation with Emilia-tan, my knees are shaking out of control! How are you going to take responsibility??”

Ram: “Otto, keep an eye on him.”

Otto: “Yes ma’am!”

Ignoring Subaru’s jape, Ram left a simple order for Otto and exited the house. Now the only ones left were two guys and one pretty girl. Under such circumstances, Otto kept up his saluting pose and stared at Subaru closely.

Otto: “Go on, please take Emilia-sama to the bed. Unless you need any help?”

Subaru: “Before that, what’s with this obedient attitude you’re taking toward Ram...”

Otto: “Well, see, Ram-san’s a direct subordinate of the Margrave, right? With that in mind, unlike Natsuki-san single-mindedly sticking to Emilia-sama, if I suck up to Ram-san instead, I’ll have a better hope of getting close to the Margrave, won’t I? Hehehe—”

Subaru: “Your initial impression as a skilled merchant is slowly shifting into a sly minor-villain, you know! Aren’t you going to do something to salvage it? Will I have to treat you like an obstacle from now on and quietly kill you off in the shadows?”

⁷⁸ English flip. Means “serious mood” (真剣な気分), originally “シリアスモード” (Serious Mode).

⁷⁹ English flip. Means “skin” (肌), originally “ダイレクト” (direct).

Complaining about Otto's identity shift, Subaru sighed, and carried Emilia into the bedroom. He lightly smoothed out the messy bedsheet with his palm, and slowly laid her down. When,

Subaru: "Ah..."

After drawing the bedsheets to her shoulders, just as he was about to leave, Subaru noticed Emilia's fingers clutching to the hem of his shirt. Sensing the reliance conveyed through the touch of her fingertips, taking in her adorableness, Subaru gently picked her fingers away. Then, wrapping them up within his hands,

Subaru: "Wait for me, Emilia."

Emilia: "-----"

Subaru: "Somehow, I'll find a way. So that you will no longer have to cry, or be hurt anymore. I promise."

Verbalizing that vow, Subaru released Emilia's hand.

Standing up, and turning around, he headed for the house's exit. ---And to Roswaal.

Because there were far too many things he must hear from the devil himself.

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Roswaal: "—I see, I think I more or less understand the situation now."

Touching a hand to his jaw, after quietly listening to Subaru's long speech, Roswaal nodded his head.

The location was in a room of the private residence where Roswaal was resting, and the only two people inside were Subaru and Roswaal. Lying on the bed, Roswaal lifted his upper body to get a better look at Subaru. And Subaru, shooting him a stern gaze in return,

Subaru: "That why, if we incorporate the Sanctuary side's interests as much as possible, I think this would be the best starting point to launch the negotiations."

Roswaal: “Aahah, it is true, that from the moment Emilia-sama entered within the barrier of the Sanctuary, Garfiel and the others’ plans might as well have already been realized. Emilia-sama herself cannot leave the Sanctuary until she overcomes the Trials. So, if the hostages they have taken for insurance simply become useless baggage draining their food supply, then there is reason to let them go... that is the idea?”

Subaru: “I think it’s a sensible argument. Of course, we won’t be throwing away or putting off the Sanctuary’s problems. This is just to take the unnecessary components out of the equation.”

Roswaal: “Sounds almost too good to be true. Deep down, you have such doubts too, no? If the liberation of the Sanctuary ever becomes far beyond reach, or, if Emilia-sama falters, and her heart could no longer withstand the Trials, then the hostages can be used as a resource to coerce Emilia-sama. Perhaps that is why you thought you’d eliminate that possibility beforehand... or something along those lines?”

With one eye closed, Roswaal looked at Subaru through his single yellow pupil. Subaru crossed his arms as he took in the contents of those words, and then, nodding,

Subaru: “Sorry, but, I didn’t really think that far. Or actually, the fact that you managed to immediately come up with that terrifying idea kinda makes me want to recoil a bit.”

Roswaal: “Aaaah it diid? Was I thinking too much into it? Sorry. Buut still, that is another way to think about it, no?”

Roswaal smiled as if to cover up the fact that he had surprised even himself with his pessimism. Seeing that smile, Subaru only looked at him wryly in return, and wondered whether Garfiel was really capable of going that far.

No matter how stubborn or inflexible he was, and even if there were times when words can’t get through to him, he wasn’t the kind of person who would stain his hands with something truly irrational or immoral.

Subaru had only known him for a few days, but that was his assessment of Garfiel. In any case,

Roswaal: “So? What would you have me do, Subaru-kun?”

Subaru: “If possible, instead of me, I want you to be the one to propose these terms. This time, it looks like... things won’t end well if I do it.”

Roswaal: “And whyyy is that?”

Subaru: “I have a feeling that bastard Garfiel’s got a thing against me. It’s not that I’ve given up on convincing him, but it’s going to get rough if I go talk to him today or tomorrow.”

Subaru could still remember the sharpness of the gaze Garfiel had given him when they parted.

Filled with hostility and disdain, it was as if those eyes were looking at someone who killed his parents—though Subaru had no clue why he would look at him this way. Had he done something that Garfiel deemed impermissible, or had he mistakenly said something that trampled on his beliefs? Either way,

Subaru: “Now that he’s gotten emotional, he’ll probably reject my ideas no matter what it is. And on top of that, if Garfiel objects, it seems Ryuzu-san will passively go along with him as well. I can already see that happening, so I hope we can avoid that possibility.”

Roswaal: “So that’s where I come in, is thaat correct? Well, alright. I will speak to granny-Ryuzu-sama and Garfiel. Although, it seems Garfiel dislikes me as well, so even I’m not sure if I could conviince him.”

Upon receiving Subaru’s proposal, Roswaal lightheartedly accepted the task.

Hearing that encouraging reply, Subaru breathed a sigh of relief. Anyways, one of his worries had been resolved for now. Then, the remaining problem would be...

Roswaal: “Weeeell then. Is that all the business you haave with me?”

Subaru: “No, not yet— I haven’t brought up the most vital issue yet.”

The most important conversation that was the reason he came here hadn’t even begun.

Roswaal tilted his head, and, closing a single eye, he brushed his long, flowing hair behind his back. Subaru wasn’t sure if it had become a habit, but he would inadvertently straighten his back whenever he was stared at by that yellow eye. Then,

Subaru: “The Trial inside the Tomb showed Emilia her past. Do you have any idea what that past might be, that was so painful for her to look back on?”

Subaru asked this question about the past that Emilia was desperately trying to hide.

And, receiving this question, Roswaal closed his yellow eye, and slightly inclined his head as though sinking into thought. Just like this, the room fell into silence, and the only sound Subaru could hear in that muted world was the sound of his own anxiety as he waited. Then,

Roswaal: “Don’t you think that asking me, instead of asking Emilia-sama directly, is a rather coowardly way to do it?”

Subaru: “You can call me an underhanded coward as much as you like. And I would certainly rather hear everything from Emilia herself if I could. But...”

The secret that she was trying to hide even with all the tears and all the pain, how could Subaru bring himself to ask her?

But even if he could understand why she wanted to keep it secret, just as he himself wanted to hide his pain about his parents, he mustn’t hesitate.

Subaru: “It’s because I want to know about her, and because I have to know. And if there is anything I can use, I will grasp at any straws I can.”

Roswaal: “I’ve had people call me all sorts of things, but to be treated like straaaw certainly is a new experience for me... Alriiightey, then.”

After letting out a small laugh, Roswaal’s expression disappeared.

He exhaled a short breath, and then stopped breathing altogether as he took in Subaru through both of his mismatched pupils. Placing him under the gazes of those different-colored eyes, Roswaal touched his raised hand to his forehead, and,

Roswaal: “Emilia-sama is a half-elf. Aand due to the Witch of Envy, half-elves are looked upon with discrimination. Thiis much, even yooou must already know, isn’t thaat right?”

Subaru: “...Yeah. I can tell how unfairly Emilia must have been treated from the way she acted in the Capital. And when I met those assholes as well.”

The images of those abominable Witch Cultists came to mind. Watching Subaru trying to shake that out of his head, Roswaal continued with “Howeeever”,

Roswaal: “While it’s true that half-elves are the targets of particularly severe peersecution... it does not end there... By the way, Subaru-kun, did you ever see an elf while you were in the Caapital?”

Subaru: “Elf? Not just half-elf? ...No, I don’t think I’ve ever seen one.”

Holding his chin, Subaru mobilized his memory to look through the different worlds he had seen. But never once, within all those worlds, had an elf— Or the fair, long-eared features of the popular impression of that race ever crossed into his memories.

Hearing Subaru’s reply, Roswaal simply remarked “Right”,

Roswaal: “The half-elves aren’t the only ones being harshly persecuted throughout all paarts of the world. The elves, for being, in part, the sires of half-elves, are also at the end of the spear.”

Subaru: “...! But, that’s way too indiscriminate no matter how you look at it. If you follow that logic, then...”

Roswaal: “humans would also have to be eradicated? Unfooortunately, in this world, humans are faar more numerous than the demi-humans, and their nations are far more powerful. It was only owing to the sheer magnitude of the ever-expanding rift between the humans and the demi-humans, that the Demi-Human War had draagged on for so long. But that has little to do with the topic at hand.”

Subaru: “So then, what does the history of persecution against elves have to do with this?”

The Demi-Human War was a phrase he had never heard before. Although he was intrigued, Subaru decided to get back to the original topic before they ran off on a tangent. Roswaal drew in his chin and with “In oother words.”, he shook his head and continued,

Roswaal: “Naturally, it would be difficult for half-elves to show their faces in a place like the Capital, and the elves, being their parent race, shared the saame difficulty. That would be why you have not seen any elves insiide the Capital.”

Subaru: “That part... I get already. But, how is that connected to this?”

Roswaal appeared unconcerned about Subaru’s request for an explanation. Leaning his back against a pillow, and, feeling its softness pushing against his back, he slightly lifted his head, looking up,

Roswaal: “As an extension of the prejudice against half-elves, the elves are also met with repression wherever they go. In that case, just where should the elves live?”

Subaru: “If they’re elves... I get the feeling they’d live in a camp inside a forest or something. Keep to some part of the forest that’s inaccessible to people, and quietly hunt and stuff.”

Roswaal: “I don’t know where you got all that information, but it is roughly along those lines. The elves were chased away from the towns, and so they could only live secretly in the depths of the forests. —The Great Elixir Forest, was once one of these homes to the elves.”

All of a sudden, Subaru noticed a change in Roswaal’s voice, and couldn’t keep himself from shuddering.

It felt as though the temperature of the room had suddenly dropped, but, naturally, it was only an illusion. And the real reason must have been Roswaal in front of him, and the indescribable power carried within his words.

As for the name of that place, Subaru had a feeling that he had heard it before.

—The Great Elixir Forest. That name had come up several times over the course of negotiations in Crusch’s mansion. They had mentioned that it is a territory within Roswaal’s domains rich in magical minerals. And that,

Subaru: “It’s now frozen in ice, and no one could go near it...”

Roswaal: “The beginning of the freezing of the Great Elixir Forest, and its subsequent spread, is recorded as an event that happened over ninety years ago. All was frozen, and all living things were sealed in ice, in a world of absolute zero— And she lived in that world, all alone.”

As if confirming Subaru’s fears, the usual strange intonations disappeared from Roswaal’s voice.

Ninety years. An exceedingly long time. And who was that person? From the flow of the conversation up to now, only one answer appeared in his mind. And, seeing Subaru at loss for words, Roswaal plainly told him.

Roswaal: “—In the depths of the Great Elixir Forest, the village and the villagers of the elven tribe that resided there remain frozen in ice even to this day, stopped in time.”

Subaru: “———”

Roswaal: “All except one, all except the half-elf girl who committed a mistake...”

Arc 4 Chapter 26 - Pile of Shit

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 11, Chapter 1 “Maid, Maid, Maid”, Part 4 (heavily changed, later half was cut)

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken – [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#), [Part 4](#)

—He never should have asked.

Feeling a cold sweat rolling from his forehead to his jaw, Subaru once again recognized the extent of his own stupidity.

A distant-sounding ring was reverberating inside his skull, and his thumping heart groaned in pain.

Roswaal: “After hearing all of this, you are starting to regret it... areeen’t you?”

Watching Subaru sink into silence, on the bed, Roswaal tilted his head.

Being asked this question by the clown playing with his long blue hair, Subaru couldn’t immediately come up with a reply. All he could do was to breathe quietly to calm himself down, and,

Subaru: “I was just, surprised, that’s all. How should I say it... Emilia is, a bit older than I thought.”

Roswaal: “Oya, didn’t you know? Emilia-sama, being half-elf, is a member of a race blessed with long lives, though it would not be as long as the elves. As for the elves, you could say that unless they are killed, they would pretty much neeever die.”

Going along with Subaru’s evasive reply, Roswaal gave a similarly half-hearted explanation.

The characteristics of the elves as Roswaal described them did seem to match the subculture-understanding of elves in the original world. Subaru wasn’t sure how much the “half” part came into, but, at least on the point of Emilia’s true age, assuming Roswaal’s words could be believed—

Subaru: “There’s at least a 60-year gap... Even with my older-sister-complex, I’m a bit lacking in experience points when it comes to that kind of age gap in a potential conquest target.”

Roswaal: “This is unrelated, but... from the way you said that, it sounds as if you’ve had contact with other races of high longevity besides Emilia-sama befoore?”

Subaru: “Well, immortals and vampires are pretty common character tropes in *gyaru gemus*⁸⁰, you know. loli-granny Ryuzu-san’s a type as well... such are the sins of past life.”

Although, Non-humans and loli-granny-types weren’t really a part of Subaru’s undertakings. Subaru’s *sutoraiku zon*⁸¹ was usually situated around older sisters and senpais at school. That’s why, when he learned that there was actually a 60-year age gap, he more or less had some thoughts about it,

Subaru: “But since she’s cute, I’m ok with it. No problem. Emilia-tan is still the brightest star in my heart!”

Besides, since long-living races live for a long time, they probably grow at a slower rate, and so they probably mentally mature at a different rate as well. He’s seen that pretty often in these kind of character setups.

Kind of like how dog age is different from human age, 20 years old in human age is probably like 200 years old in elf years. Then—

Subaru: “If I think of it that way, 90 years old Emilia-tan is still young, just a little girl... No, from the elves’ point of view, she’s might actually be a loli. Oyoy, if such a sexy beautiful girl is only a loli... that’s a whole new genre isn’t it!”

Roswaal: “Even though indulging in various kind of fantastical deluusions is a good thing, the reality is haaarsher than you imagined. With the passage of time, people will grow. Even the minds of elves would not mature any slower aaat all.”

⁸⁰ Means “ギャルゲー” (Gal game, for more info see [here](#)). I can’t find a suitable expression for this in English, so I’ll leave it in Romaji.

⁸¹ Means “ストライク ゾーン” (strike zone). Given this is a baseball term, there is no suitable expression for this in English, so I’ll leave it in Romaji.

Subaru: “You... I’m desperately trying to convince myself Emilia-tan is a little girl here, why do you have to immediately disprove me...”

Even though it was just wishful thinking, it was still annoying to have his last hope pulverized right off the bat. Under Subaru’s resentful leer, with “Besides”, Roswaal continued,

Roswaal: “Eeeeven I can’t just stand by while watching you cover your ooown eyes and pretend nothing haaappened. Riiight, Subaru-kun?”

Subaru: “———”

Roswaal: “Having heard from me what you shooouldn’t have heard, do you regret it so much?”

Subaru: “...You, really are an annoying guy.”

Despite Subaru trying to gloss it over, just as he was about to bury it away, Roswaal just had to dig it all up again. After tossing back this limp retort, Subaru cursed at himself one more time.

That heavy cross borne upon Emilia’s delicate shoulders— he had dishonestly heard it from someone other than herself.

Subaru: “...In the Trial I saw my past. I’m sure Emilia saw hers too. In that case, the past she saw must have been...”

Roswaal: “If it is the past one least wishes to look back upon... Then the one Emilia-sama saw was no doubt the day when the Great Eltor Forest froze.”

Roswaal confirmed Subaru’s fears.

Carrying on from this train of thought, Subaru came to realize just what horror he had been forcing Emilia to go through. There is much to gain from finding closure, and overcoming one’s past— But...

Subaru: “Then, all that time, I’ve been making her face the past where she froze everyone in ice...?”

Between Emilia and Subaru, the magnitude of the guilt attached to their forsaken pasts were worlds apart.

Of course, it was difficult for Subaru to come to terms with the fact that he was cut off from his parents by an entire world between them. And he would not forgive himself if he cheapened that experience, or saw it as anything less than it was.

But on the other hand, what about Emilia's problem?

Whereas Subaru was loved by his parents, received a push on his back, and was forgiven, would the past that Emilia had to face grant her this affirmation, and forgive her for her mistake?

Would she receive this, and move on from her past?

Subaru: "Emilia freezing the forest... and the elven village inside, is all of this certain? It sounds as if there's no room for debate, but something feels off..."

Roswaal: "It's true that we can't be sure what really happened. Buuut, this was told to me directly by Emilia-sama herself. It was Emilia-sama herself who confessed to be the one who sealed the forest in ice. That much, shouldn't leave room for any further contention?"

Subaru: "So if you aren't sure what really happened, it could just be a misunderstanding... To begin with, Emilia-tan isn't the kind of person who could do such a thing..."

Roswaal: "No noo, you misunderstaaand, that won't doo, Subaru-kun."

While Subaru was trying to search for some excuse, Roswaal held him back with three drawn-out calls. Having been cut off this way, Subaru shot him a sharp and perilous glare. But Roswaal only waved his hand, pretending not to notice it,

Roswaal: "The fact of what actually happened, is nooot the issue here. The real issue is the fact that Emilia-sama is firmly convinced of the idea, «I am the one who froze the forest»."

Subaru: "———"

Roswaal: "To Emilia-sama, this is the truth of what happened. Consequently, the Trial which Emilia-sama must face is also based upon this version of the truth. —In thaaaat case, just what do you think we should do?"

Subaru: "You... What are you even thinking?"

Asking this question as if they were playing some lighthearted game, it was impossible to fathom what was going through Roswaal's mind. As if he couldn't take it anymore, Subaru wrenched out these words.

Just how... How could this man keep smiling in a situation like this?

Subaru: "I don't expect you to sympathize with Emilia's past, or feel for her or anything of the sort, but... if you know full well the weight of that burden, and know what pain must be going through her heart, then what the hell are you doing having so much fun while she is sent in to challenge the impossible Trials?"

Roswaal: "Fuuuumu."

Subaru: "What is wrong with you!? You... don't you want Emilia to be the Monarch? You are the one who is going to make her the Monarch, aren't you? I know what you are trying to do. You think letting Emilia liberate the Sanctuary will win her the support of both Arlam Village and the Sanctuary... that I understand..."

But,

Subaru: "On the other hand, when it comes down to the critical moment you're just leaving Emilia to her own devices. If she cannot liberate the Sanctuary, then the whole game falls apart... How can you just sit around as if there's nothing to worry about when the situation has come to this deadlock!"

Roswaal: "..."

Subaru: "I've said it before. I won't rest until I've made Emilia King. And I intend to make that true... As for you, do you really intend to make her King?"

Roswaal: "—Without a doubt."

Roaring, his shoulders trembling, Subaru asked Roswaal this heartfelt question. But, at the end of his last question, Roswaal's answer came down like a bucket of cold water on his seething face.

In front of his eyes, Roswaal didn't move an inch— with steady eyes, his gaze was fixed dead upon Subaru. Then, he,

Roswaal: “Do I intend to make her the King? Certainly, I do— Other than myself, there is no one else who would wish more for her to be King. Not even Emilia-sama herself, or a man like you, can match my desire for this, or the reason for my conviction.”

Subaru: “Ros... waal?”

Roswaal: “That you would hound me like this, and doubt my motivations, is truly laughable. Absolutely, laughable— Are we still not there yet, after all?”

There was rage in his quiet words, and it was the first time Subaru ever sensed this from Roswaal.

But, halfway through, the heat vanished from his impassioned words, until, at last, it fell to a whisper and scattered like mist. In the end, with a final profound musing, he brought his speech to a close, and,

Roswaal: “Subaru-kun. Unfoootunately, this will be all for tonight. I aaam still recovering from my woounds. At least, I hope you’d grant me a little reest.”

Subaru: “We’re... No, nevermind.”

Subaru reached out his hand, trying to hold Roswaal back from one-sidedly ending the conversation, but he realized it would be futile, and drew it back again.

Ending their talk in a lighthearted tone, Roswaal plainly refused any further discussion. Since he had already been rejected this way, even though the person was still lying in the bed right in front of him, it was already too late to ask anything more.

Shaking his head, holding back his disappointment, Subaru turned his back to the bed.

He had already said what he came here to say. Whether or not the situation of the villagers of Arlam would change for the better is still unknown, but Ryuzu will probably not refuse Roswaal’s request. If that much can be done, then the stagnating circumstances will at least move forward. Even though, for Subaru, there were still many more hurdles to come.

Roswaal: “—Subaru-kun.”

Just as he was about to leave the room, Roswaal’s call stopped him. Halting his legs, and looking back, he saw that Roswaal had already laid his head down on the pillow, and was not looking at him.

Roswaal: “The Qualification... You’ve received it?”

Subaru: “Ah. Yeah, haven’t I mentioned it yet? Yeah. I took the Trial too. Actually, if going inside is like getting baptized with that stuff, then maybe you could...”

Roswaal: “—Noo no, that will not be possible. I’m afraid the Tomb will not accept me. The fact that I carry these scars of rejection should make that clear enough.”

Having glossed over the part about the Qualification, and recalling their conversation from the previous world, Subaru raised his brows in astonishment. In the previous world, when he told Roswaal that he had challenged the Trials, he could remember Roswaal’s expression turning terribly dark.

But this time, there was only a tinge of loneliness that didn’t seem noteworthy at all.

Roswaal: “...Choose what is best, Subaru-kun.”

Subaru: “What?”

Roswaal: “In this place, you are the one person who could move most freely. You are completely unbound by the Sanctuary. Nor are you constrained by any obligation to the Royal Selection.”

Subaru: “———”

Roswaal: “Go on being guided by your desires, go on struggling, until you hold everything within your hands. To agonize, and to be lost, and only then can you obtain it... Even if it would not satisfy you, even if you could not understand it, see it through to the end.”

Roswaal said this without showing his face. Without the usual clownish intonations, Subaru was stunned by these uncharacteristically cynical remarks, and could only stand there stupidly on the spot.

Until, after a little while had passed, he suddenly realized that Roswaal had been saying those words to himself.

Subaru: “Hey... That’s, not like you at all. What’s wrong, Ros-chi?”

Roswaal: “Sometimes I want to try something different, thaaat’s all— I suppose, it seems I didn’t make it.”

There was no way he could understand that open-ended sentence. But, just as he was about to ask, Roswaal waved his hand on the bed, urging Subaru to leave.

Seeing this, standing in front of Roswaal, who had turned away from him, Subaru let out a long, drawn out sigh through his nostrils,

Subaru: "Good night."

And, leaving this behind, he stepped out of the room.

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Ram: "...You didn't impose any burdens on Roswaal-sama, I hope?"

The first thing that greeted Subaru as he came out of the bedroom were these words of interrogation and Ram's sharpened stare.

The pink-haired girl was about half a head shorter than Subaru, but on matters that concerned Roswaal, her intimidating presence would make her body appear twice as big as it actually is. In any case, Subaru started shriveling under the immense pressure.

Subaru: "We just calmly talked about some stuff, that's all. There were no collar-grabs or wrestling throws or anything, don't worry."

Ram: "What an optimistic Barusu. Setting foot inside the Tomb, only to be rejected, do you realize how cruel that was to Roswaal-sama... You don't even understand that much, and have the audacity to be a smartass about it?"

Ram didn't conceal her displeasure as she blasted back at Subaru for his response. Seeing her priorities clearly laid out, Subaru couldn't help but smile wryly, and,

Subaru: "Well he was gonna go to sleep, so I kinda got kicked out... I already said what I had to say, so it's fine."

Ram: "Is it... At least, if Roswaal-sama makes the request, I think Ryuzu-sama will probably accept. But as for Garf... I don't know how he will react."

Subaru: "If he's gonna grumble, then we'll have to rely on your seduction skills. You just have to strike a cute pose and... You know how to do that, right?"

Ram: "Isn't Ram cute already?"

Subaru: "No I mean, well, if it's just the outer appearance then it's pretty cute..."

After all, aside from the hair color, she looked exactly like Rem. Very very cute. The only problem was that the cuteness and Ram's fresh-personality kind of managed to cancel each other out.

Subaru: "But to go after you, Garfeil sure has some bizarre tastes. No, or, maybe it's just hard to tell from the appearance... Kinda like a puffer fish, you kn-owowow!!"

Ram: "I am pretty sure that wasn't a compliment, so this is how I am responding, Barusu."

Stomping on Subaru's toes with her heel to her heart's content while watching tears jerking out of his eyes, Ram huffed through her nose. Then, she stood in front of the door to Roswaal's bedroom, and,

Ram: "Ram will change Roswaal-sama's bandages, and then rest for the night. I suppose Barusu will sleep in the cathedral like yesterday? Even a Barusu should be able to remember a simple location, I assume?"

Subaru: "My sense of direction's surprisingly good, you know. Besides, it's the biggest building here. Although having no streetlights is kind of a pain."

The Sanctuary was an undeveloped area that relied on starlight to light the way at night. But still, on clear nights, the light descending from a star-filled sky was often enough to keep the darkness at bay. Unfortunately, it's cloudy today.

Looking out the window, aside from the sprinkles of glimmering lights from the village houses, all the rest was completely dark.

He felt just a little, tiny unease about the road back home.

Subaru: “Getting lost and wandering into the forest and getting a random encounter with a monster and then facing a *warui owari*⁸²— probably won’t happen, right? It’s ok, it’s ok.”

Ram: “The possibility of that happening was very low to begin with, but after you said that out loud it seems to have slightly increased. Alright. Barusu, the cathedral is directly to the right-hand side after you leave the building.”

Subaru: “Ook got it! So, it’s the chopstick-hand side, right? Although there doesn’t seem to be a chopstick-culture in this world.”

Since the dining culture here mainly consists of silverwares like knives and forks and spoons, Subaru’s remark just now obviously made no sense to Ram. Anyways, thinking about whether he should try shaving down some trees and start mass producing chopsticks here if he ever gets the chance,

Subaru: “Anyways, I’ll head back to the cathedral... Since it’s still uncertain whether they can return to the village, just so we don’t get their hopes up, maybe it’d be best if we don’t mention that we’re negotiating for their release yet?”

Ram: “Agreed. If we hold the talks tomorrow... It would still be at least the day after tomorrow before they could leave. In the meantime, how to deal with Echidna’s Tomb is what we need to think about.”

Subaru: “———”

Inadvertently, just as he was about to say some last words on his way out of the house, Subaru suddenly froze in place. The abrupt halt sent a surprised look onto Ram’s face, but Subaru, who had turned around to look at her, seemed even more confused than she was. Then,

Subaru: “...What did you say just now?”

He asked in a raspy voice. Hearing Subaru’s question, Ram, still not any less surprised, tried to remember what she just said, and,

Ram: “The Tomb is what we need to think about?”

⁸² Engrish flip. Means “bad/undesirable ending” (悪い終わり), originally “BADEND” (in latin script).

Subaru: “No, before that.”

Ram: “Isn’t Ram cute already?”

Subaru: “Went back too far! —You said Echidna’s Tomb, right?”

Feeling stupid after missing the right answer twice in a row, Subaru gave up and answered the question himself. Seeing Ram nodding reluctantly, Subaru pressed his hand against his forehead. —With terrifying speed, the memories flooded back into his consciousness.

Subaru: “Echidna.”

It was the name of the Witch of Greed, that white-haired girl in funerary dress, the self-proclaimed Incarnation of the Thirst for Knowledge, and the most important *Bokukko*-stereotype⁸³ in this parallel world. And above all,

Subaru: “What the hell were you trying to do... Messing with other people’s memories...”

The entity who had done her work on Subaru’s memories so that no one else could learn of her secrets.

At the end of the tea party, before the impending Trials, she had forcibly extracted an Oath from Subaru. But if that was the price he had to pay to receive the Qualifications, then he would willingly accept it.

Subaru: “Whether it was bugged or that was how it’s supposed to work... Either way, the restriction’s lifted!”

The restriction that Echidna was supposed to have placed on Subaru was lifted, and his memories were unbound.

Within his mind, the encounter with the Witches, the tea party, and his meeting with Echidna in school-uniform in his old classroom in his original world, all of them, one by one, returned to him. And, having remembered, Subaru’s thoughts arrived on a possible a way to break open the deadlock on the Sanctuary. It would be akin to a forbidden move, but,

⁸³ A girl that uses the pronoun “boku” (ボク), which is primarily used by boys and young men. Most are tomboys or completely unaware of social norms.

Subaru: “If the cathedral’s on the chopstick-hand side, then the Tomb’s on the bowl-hand side——!”

Ram: “Barusu——?”

Subaru: “I better not keep you up too late! It won’t be good to put too much strain on a guy who just recovered from a major illness!”

Waving up his hand in response to Ram’s call from behind, Subaru charged out of the building and into the night. Not to the bed inside the cathedral, but to the Tomb he had left only two hours ago.

Timewise, even if he went to the Tomb, there was very little chance that he’d be able to confirm his idea. But while the chance may be low, he couldn’t resist trying it out. At least, if it couldn’t be done on this night, he’d know.

Subaru: “After taking the First Trial, all sorts of annoying things just popped one after another. So invite me to another tea party, Witch... no, Echidna!”

Flying down the streets of the Sanctuary, lit only by the dim natural lights of the night, Subaru ran on.

The icy wind, the muddy ground, the sweat on his brow, and his panting breaths—— All these sensations pressed his exhausted body onward. And, when he arrived,

Garfiel: “Yo... thought you’d be comin’.”

Blocking Subaru’s path was the youth with short blonde hair—— Garfiel, standing guard in front of the Tomb.

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Garfiel: “Impressive, out runnin’ so late at night. Born a man aft’r all, we’re obliged t’make an effort n’get strong. «Th’Winbrook’s the warrior’s qualifications», yeah?”

Garfiel spread out his arms standing in middle of the night’s path, gradually baring his fangs as he spoke, barring Subaru’s way ahead. Seeing him do this, all the hairs on Subaru’s skin stood on end.

Subaru: “Ohh, sorry but I really wasn’t pretending to be jogging or anything like that. Too bad I can’t stay and chat. It’s not that I have a deadline, but, it doesn’t hurt to do it early...”

Garfiel: “Yer’not gettin’ it, oy.”

A sharp noise— It was the cracking-sound of Garfiel’s foot stomping into the ground faster than the eyes could see.

Soil flew up in all directions, and stamped into the hard surface of the path was a boot-shaped impression. Seeing Subaru’s eyes widen, Garfiel clacked his teeth,

Garfiel: “If I see ya comin’ back here again with this late-night runnin’ bullshit, can’t guarantee what I’ll do.”

Subaru: “It’s only been a short amount of time, but why does it already sound like we can’t understand each other... Am I left out of the loop about something here?”

Garfiel: “Who knows. But you’re blind to what’s happenin’ around ya, think least that’s for sure.”

Subaru said this, trying to relax the tension in the atmosphere, but it didn’t seem to reach Garfiel, whose gleaming eyes continued to harbor the same hostility. Garfiel, touching the white scar on his forehead,

Garfiel: “All that’s ahead from here’s the Tomb. You ain’t gonna go all the way there t’take a piss, are ya?”

Subaru: “What, you wanna go together? Peeing on a Witch’s grave or whatever, I actually never thought of this kind of revenge tactic before.”

From what Subaru knows about Echidna, maybe she won’t even be angry about it, and might even find it amusing. But anyways, without lowering his guard about Subaru, Garfiel seemed to want to continue the conversation,

Garfiel: “It couldn’t be that yer tryin’ to challenge another Trial on the same night y’passed the first one, could it? That’d be a bit greedy, ain’t it?”

Subaru: “No way I’m considering something that crazy. I was just, planning another approach.”

Garfiel: “Yer plottin’.”

Subaru: “I’m plotting.”

Call it backhanded, a forbidden method, a mysterious data disc or whatever you want. Faced with absolute darkness, blind within that pitch-black world where he could only feel his way forward, he must clench tight onto any small hope of light, suck out its marrows, and swallow it to the last drop.

Subaru: “So get out of the way, Garfiel. I need to go into the Tomb. Perhaps there’ll be a way to solve all of our problems...”

Garfiel: “S’rry, but absolutely not. Yer absolutely. Not. Gettin’ into this Tomb.”

Against Subaru’s determination, Garfiel had no intention of backing down.

Met with Garfiel’s stubborn refusal, Subaru’s confusion was giving way to anger.

Just why, why, of all people, must this man be the one standing in his way.

Subaru: “You probably feel the same way about me, don’t you? That’s why you’re standing here in front of me like this. But even so...”

Garfiel: “Didn’t I tell ya not to give me that bullshit? Once I decided, I ain’t gonna bend. You ain’t gettin’ through, for the Sanctuary or not.”

Subaru: “Why do you hate me so much all of a sudden... Just what the hell do you have against me!!”

Compared to the first day, and the last iteration, Garfiel’s attitude could not have been more different. Faced with this unreasonable treatment, Subaru screamed, demanding Garfiel’s true intentions.

Hearing that question, Garfiel scrunched up his nose, twisting his face into an expression not unlike a wild beast, and spoke.

Garfiel: “—Yer stench.”

Subaru: “—Huh?”

Without meaning to, Subaru groaned stupidly.

In front of him, Garfiel covered his own nose with his palm,

Garfiel: “Ever since y’came outta the Tomb, the stench of the Witch’s Miasma’s just been fumin’ out’a yer body. —Y’expect me t’trust a guy stinkin’ of the Witch rollin’ with a half-devil!? The fuck y’take me for!?”

Jolting up his arms, exposing his fangs, Garfiel laid bare his rage,

Garfiel: “This is the Sanctuary! The Experimental Grounds of the Witch of Greed! The cesspool of half-wits who have no place to go, a fuckin’ pile of futureless shit!!”

Arc 4 Chapter 27 - Whisper

Has been cut from the Light Novel Adaptation

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Complete](#)

—For Subaru, it was a sound of rage that invoked a strong sense of déjà vu.

Subaru: “The Witch’s... scent...”

This would be the second time Subaru had been treated as an enemy because of it.

Having picked up a scent that Subaru himself couldn’t smell, the hatred within Garfiel’s eyes seemed as if they were glaring at the very murderer of his parents.

Subaru already knew the sharpness of that gaze, and that same torrent of hostility.

The Witch’s stench. A criminal’s lingering scent. And a man ensnared by the Witch. Those were the words she once lashed upon him right before she took his life, so far had their relationship deteriorated.

Garfiel: “What y’lookin’ all stupid for? Got hit where it hurts and forgot how t’talk?”

In front of a shocked Subaru shaken into speechlessness, Garfiel had put his inexhaustible rage into words. Even after limply dropping his arms, Garfiel did not lower his guard.

Watching Subaru’s every move, even the small sense of familiarity that was supposedly between them—was already nowhere to be found.

Subaru: “Um, about the Witch’s stench...”

Garfiel: “Huh?”

Subaru: “The stench that’s floating around my body, it was after I came out of the Tomb— after the Trial, that it started floating around, right?”

Garfiel: “...Yeah. Didn’t even mind it before that, but soon as y’came back from the Trial it’s suddenly reekin’ up the place. I don’t know what y’did inside, but I ain’t a nice enough guy to trust a bastard smellin’ like that.”

Seeing Garfiel nodding in affirmation to his question, Subaru let out a short sigh and closed his eyes.

Then it’s confirmed— the Witch’s stench clinging onto Subaru becomes stronger immediately after Return by Death.

He had suspected it before, but he had always subconsciously avoided this conclusion. Only now, did Subaru finally accept that piece of the answer.

—The one returning Natsuki Subaru from death, was the Witch.

He didn’t know why. There shouldn’t be any connection. But, incredibly, he could understand it, and accept it. It was like the sensation of hesitating to place down the one final piece that would complete the puzzle, and then, finally doing so, seeing the complete picture at last.

Subaru: “Just what, do you have to do with me... Until I came to this world, I hadn’t even encountered a single paranormal phenomenon in my life. And after I got here, I never even got a chance to meet the Witch-sama that everyone keeps talking about... In fact, I died within six hours of being summoned here.”

Subaru was given the special characteristic of Return by Death upon being invited to this world.

If that was connected to the Witch, then the summoning itself must have been connected to the Witch as well. Up to this point, he had never once asked why, but—

Subaru: “In the end, I can’t ignore it anymore, huh...”

Garfiel: “What’re y’mutterin’ about? I ain’t got the time t’worry about this crap, so go straight back to sleepin’ in the cathedral. Don’t come botherin’ me with this bullshit again.”

Subaru: "...You're letting me go? Going by what you said, I'm a suspicious bastard with the Witch's stench floating all over me, right? It's the middle of the night, and there's just us here... sounds just like the perfect situation for either a late-night tryst or quietly killing someone off, doesn't it?"

Garfiel: "Hah. I ain't a patient guy and it's not that I didn't think about it... Chewin' yer head to shreds' easy right now, but then what? When the half-devil finds out yer dead there'll be even more trouble, even I can see that much."

Seeing Subaru tilting his head, unable to understand his intentions, Garfiel continued "But",

Garfiel: "I wouldn't want you goin' near the Tomb and get yerself stinkin' even more. Right now, only I got a sharp enough nose to notice it... But who knows when the old hag and others'in this shithole'll start noticin' it too? And there're the even more troublin' guys."

Subaru: "Even more troubling..."

Garfiel: "Y'have an idea or two who, don't ya? Y'didn't just start reekin' of that stench today. When they smell that stench, those assholes will wanna come."

Listening to Garfiel clacking his fangs saying this, Subaru held his breath as a flood of thoughts came racing through his mind.

Seeing that reaction, Garfiel snorted, and, with a wave of his arm as if swatting away an insect,

Garfiel: "So get outta here. I won't do anythin' this time. Tomorrow onwards, you stay nice and quiet and I won't have to do nothin' either. But don't let me find you comin' near the Tomb or gettin' involved with me or Granny. Won't be a nice experience for either of us'if that happens."

Subaru: "Mutual non-interference, huh. I don't bother you and you won't bother me. That's pretty generous."

Garfiel: "«Makin' it out alive after steppin' on Gringham's tale», yeah? Now get th'hell outta my sight before I change my mind. I rather not make Ram hate me if I can."

Uttering the name of the girl he liked, Garfiel announced this as though he was prepared to do the worst. The menacing hostility emanating from within him was only barely held in check by self-restraint, that much was clear. Though Subaru still wanted to argue, and continue this debate,

—It'd be best to retreat for now.

Coming to this conclusion, he exhaled and dropped his shoulders, and took a step back.

Seeing Subaru no longer intent on going any further, Garfiel's own posture noticeably shifted as well. Closing one eye, and exhaling a deep breath from his nostrils, he sat himself down in the middle of the path to the Tomb. Crossing his arms, he looked up at Subaru,

Garfiel: "Good. Don't do anythin' unnecessary now— I'll be here from today 'til the end of the Trials. Tomorrow, the day after, or the one a'fer that, day and noon and night, I got no intention of lettin' you in. I'll leave it at that, so remember it good."

Subaru: "If you don't want Ram to hate you, you might wanna go back for a bath from time to time."

Garfiel: "Before I start stinkin' as bad as you, you better do everythin' you can to get Emilia-sama to pass the Trials— Now get outta my sight."

Garfel closed his eyes, and it seemed he was serious about spending the night here.

At first glance, there appeared to be openings all over. If he withdrew from here, and circled around through another part of the forest, perhaps it's not impossible to sneak into the Tomb, but,

Subaru: "Better not..."

Garfiel's probably guarded against that as well.

As long as Subaru stayed within sight, Garfiel will only restrain him with words. But if Subaru did something to trample on this consideration, Garfiel will no longer be so lenient.

Right now, Subaru would have no chance against an opponent who could throw Patrasche along with the carriage, nor was there a way to get past his beast-like sense of smell.

Subaru: "Ignoring the tea party's coming back to haunt me, isn't it..."

Putting a hand against his forehead, he regretted the way he handled the good fortune of having a Witch in front of him to chat with. Although, he couldn't have asked her about any of this at the time, so he couldn't blame himself too much.

Subaru: "At least, there's nothing else I can do tonight. I must find some other way..."

Without getting past Garfiel, there was no way to reach the Tomb. If Subaru cannot reach the Tomb, then there will be no other option except to have Emilia take the Trials.

As far as Subaru can tell, it would be impossible for her to pass the Trials in three days. And if he cannot take any action within three days, then,

Subaru: "Elsa will attack the mansion. And the chance to repel her will slip away."

Even if it meant seeking help from a Witch, Subaru had hoped to find some kind of alternative by speaking to Echidna. But Garfiel had blocked that.

The alternative, of attempting to take the Trials without seeking Echidna's advice, was also blocked. Coming to this point, Subaru realized that the situation had come to dead end.

Subaru: "Oy, oy, oy... Isn't this situation just plain bad?"

Lacking the strength to force his way through Garfiel, Subaru will need to be crafty as well as articulate in order to reach the Trials, or otherwise, he must find some other way to move Garfiel away from this place. But it would be impossible to do this alone.

Subaru: "And even if I try to recruit allies... neither Ram nor Otto are on my side on this one."

Considering its significance to the Royal Selection, those two had judged that it would be best to let Emilia take the Trials. Of course, if only they saw how much Emilia would be worn out over the next two days, perhaps their opinions would change, but,

Subaru: "Then we won't make it back in time for the attack. Isn't there something... anything I can do?"

The time difference, between the time needed to make everyone see the difficulty of having Emilia pass the Trials and the timing of the imminent danger only Subaru knew about, was far too great. And if

Subaru continued to insist on taking the Trials himself, it would only be interpreted as his lack of confidence in Emilia.

It gouged at his heart to think what Emilia might feel about this. It was not that he didn't believe in her. Rather, if time permitted it, Subaru believed beyond a doubt that she will accomplish the task that was given to her. Yet,

—Even knowing that her task is too heavy for her to bear, how can you still think so?

Subaru: “———”

Deep down, a low, dark whisper made Subaru halt his steps.

Occasionally, he'd hear whispers like this. An obscure, dark part of himself mocking, laughing at him from behind for foolishly reaching for such hopes.

Subaru: “The Trials will keep eating away at her. And even so, for the sake of the expectations of those around her and to fulfill her own wish, she will carry on, no matter how much it hurts her. That's how it will be.”

—Disregard her wounds and move forward until it is overcome, is that really what you want?

She will hold in her pain, her tears, and her sobs, and keep on walking, and in the end, the path will surely open, and her wish will come true. Was that what he believed?

—There are wounds that don't need to be opened, memories that don't need to be faced, and pasts that don't need to be atoned for.

Subaru: “She believes she had done something wrong, and that she must do something to make it right. That's why she is facing her past, and why she is suffering, isn't it...?”

—But why must that time be now? Isn't this the worst possible timing?

Is it truly necessary to face one's past? Must all committed sins be atoned for? And is redemption something that can be forced?

The past she didn't want anyone else to know, if it wasn't for the Trials, Subaru would never have forced her to reveal it. One day, with time, perhaps she will come to terms with it, and then there will be a chance to overcome that past.

But did it have to be now? Was this really the right time for that?

Would an answer she found through the obsessive notion that she must do something to atone truly carry a significance which she could be proud of?

Subaru: "At least, I think I'm glad I faced my past. I managed to pass, and even though I know it's just self-satisfaction, the way I am standing here now is an answer to that question."

—But that's because you were already prepared to face your past, wasn't it?

Even while he hated himself, there was a girl who loved him and accepted him.

It was because she was there, because of what she did for him, that Subaru was able to reveal that unsightly side of himself to his parents, peel open that ugliness inside him, and at last lift up his face to say his farewells.

—Right now, is Emilia prepared for that?

Having touched only a fragment of the weight of her past, just how much strength had Subaru's words and actions lent her up to now?

A shallow worldview, some insignificant efforts, and his empty proclamations of love. Just how much support could they have truly given her?

Subaru: "...Just what... can I even do for you?"

He liked Emilia. He fell in love with her. He wanted to go on being in love with her, he thought. He wanted her to like him. He wanted her to fall in love with him. And he wanted her to go on being in love with him, he thought, too.

That's why, he wanted to make her happy. To become her strength. And to take all the pain, and bitterness, and sorrow in her stead.

Even if he could not bear it, even if she would not let him, he wanted to be her support.

—Like the girl who brought him back and made him stand, Subaru wanted to do for Emilia what Rem had done for him. Like Rem, who loved him with the entirety of her being, in the same way, Subaru wanted to become Emilia's support.

Only this way, could Subaru truly fulfill the first promise he made to Rem. And so, right now, what Subaru must do was,

Subaru: "The time you need to stand, and the resolve to carry it through, all that I could do for you... Leave them to me, alright?"

Rolling his hand into a fist, Subaru straightened out exactly what he must do, and, letting out a small sigh, he edged up his lips into a smile.

Wait, what he was going to do hadn't changed at all.

Subaru: "I will do everything I can for her— After all that headache it just comes down to those few words, huh. Well, you gotta have some self-awareness about what you're gonna do, right?"

For now, the question was how to solve the unavoidable problems at hand and overcome obstacles that accompanied them. And, after clearing them, concoct some shocking, ingenious plan to open this whole situation up.

Time waits for no one. And the limit was drawing near. But he couldn't afford to jump to the wrong conclusions now. He had already made that mistake too many times before.

Subaru: "Nothing will get better if I just turn my head down when things are bad. At least everything will only get worse as time goes by. I know that all too well, unfortunately."

Leaving it all to time and hoping it will solve itself was absolutely out of the question.

For Subaru, this is the unforgiving way of the world, and it was for this very reason that all his struggling, writhing, and resisting had meaning.

Subaru: "The situation is at its worst. Time is running out. And there's still a mountain of things I don't understand, but."

That's nothing special, it is same for anyone, but even so, the fact that he had been granted the chance to do it all over again makes all the difference.

Subaru: "Don't doubt it for a second. Natsuki Subaru's courage will save you, Emilia—!"

One way or another, let's power through this with all we've got.

Arc 4 Chapter 28 - Conversation over Tea

Has been cut from the Light Novel Adaptation

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#)

Feeling the first light of dawn burning onto his eyelids, Subaru sat himself up in the darkness.

It seemed he had fallen asleep while thinking. But since he sank into the sea of thought so late in the night, he had only managed two or three hours of sleep.

Subaru: “This would’ve been unthinkable back in the old world. Sunrises are supposed to be when I fall asleep, you know.”

Saying this while giving his body a few turns, Subaru took a quick look around at the others who were beginning to wake in the cathedral. When they noticed Subaru’s gaze upon them, one by one they waved at him, and he did the same in return. Then, standing up, he headed for the cathedral’s door.

The crisp morning air greeted him as he went outside, where it seemed the residents of the Sanctuary and some of the refugees were working together to prepare breakfast.

Woman: “Aya, you’re already up, Subaru-sama.”

Subaru: “He-yo, good morning. Another fresh morning today?”

Woman: “Sure is. The wind’s a bit chilly though... Looks like you managed to get a good night’s sleep as well, Subaru-sama.”

With a smile, the woman with a familiar face called out to him and touched a finger to her cheek. Seeing this, Subaru touched his cheek in the same spot and felt something sticky there— and noticed there was a trail of saliva drooling down the side of his face.

Subaru: “Wah, no, embarrassing!”

Why was it that short periods of sleep make people wake up even sloppier, anyway? Like when you wake up looking abnormally messy after only a little nap, there must be some kind of rule to this.

Chuckling, and watching Subaru ponder about this unproductive question, another woman— with short dog-ears on her head, offered him a wet towel. Subaru briefly thanked her, and quickly took the towel and wiped up his mouth.

“Off now?” he looked at them, and both women affirmed that it was. Subaru borrowed the towel so he could wash his face by the pond, and waved them good-day.

Watching the both of them as he left, within the interaction between them he didn’t see a single trace of unease or misunderstanding. There was only natural communication between members of two different races.

Over the past few days— Which, if you include the time rewound by Return by Death, would have been a week, there had been no noticeable conflicts between the refugees and the residents of the Sanctuary.

The refugees were in high spirits, and although he’d hate to admit it, the fact that their Lord Roswaal remained with them must have brought them a considerable sense of reassurance. In reality, the villagers’ faith in Subaru, who ate and slept with them, also played no small part in this. But Subaru, with his low evaluation of his own influence, didn’t take this into account.

Quite contrary to the ominous atmosphere of this place, the residents of the Sanctuary, beginning with the beast-eared woman just now, had grown more and more talkative. At the very least, Subaru felt that it was to the point where the divide between human and half-bloods no longer existed anywhere beyond their thoughts.

Subaru: “The only real thing dividing them was the barrier, wasn’t it... I don’t know what might’ve been going through the mind of whoever put up that thing, but that was a pretty asshole thing to do.”

If Garfiel’s words could be believed, this place would be the Experimental Grounds of the Witch of Greed. In that case, the one who erected the barrier to prevent the half-bloods from escaping might have been the Witch herself.

Subaru: “Echidna... huh. At the end of the day, I still can’t figure out what that Witch is up to.”

White-haired and white-skinned, a monochrome girl wrapped in something of a funerary dress.

Lost her life 400 years ago, yet still bound to the present world, not unlike a ghost. Contrary to her proclamation of not interfering with the real world, she had met with Subaru within the Trial grounds and offered her detailed commentary on his actions.

Then, she hid all the memories inside Subaru’s mind relating to herself, only to allow it to be remembered again through some careless coincidence— None of it made any sense.

Perhaps, there was some profound reason behind it, he thought.

Subaru: “Or if she just enjoys screwing with people to see what happens, then there’s seriously nothing I can do. Come to think of it, what are you supposed to think of a lady who makes people she just met drink her bodily fluids for no reason, anyway...”

Unpleasant memories of drinking Dona Tea resurfaced in his mind. But since it was something that was supposed to have happened in that spiritual world, he really wanted to believe that his actual body hadn’t really absorbed any of the Dona bits.

Anyways, regardless of her intentions, the Sanctuary remained surrounded by the barrier, and its inhabitants remained trapped within it.

Subaru: “When it comes down to it, the greatest obstacle at the moment is... Garfiel, isn’t it?”

Whether it was to negotiate with Echidna directly or to personally challenge the Trials, the bottleneck was how to deal with Garfiel, whose hostility towards Subaru had jumped up.

If the change in his opinion of Subaru was truly due to the Witch’s stench— the side-effect of Return by Death, then improving Garfiel’s attitude towards him could prove a near-impossible task.

Whether it was the Wolgarms, or the battle against the White Whale, Subaru had managed to turn the stench to his advantage and create breakthroughs in the situation, but,

Subaru: “I can make it smell stinkier, but I don’t know how to make it go away... Don’t imagine deodorants would do anything to it. Actually, what am I saying. Stinky or not stinky, what am I, garbage?”

At least, there was a way to intentionally intensify his stench by telling someone about Return by Death. And judging from everything that had happened so far, the intensified odor doesn't seem to last forever.

It seems, just like any ordinary smell, it will gradually fade over time. But on the other hand, it would also mean that there was no other method to make it go away.

Subaru: "I definitely can't count on Garfiel's attitude softening. And though I'd rather not think about it... If I mess up and Return by Death again..."

If he dies again, and starts over inside the Tomb, the lingering scent clinging onto Subaru now will be compounded over again with the stench of the Witch. If that happens, it would be terrifying to imagine what Garfiel's reaction will be.

Facing the worst possible case of losing his life, by starting over, Subaru could alter the result.

And salvage everything— Yet, in spite of Subaru's greed, the fact is, he hadn't managed to fulfill everything. And there were still things he could not bring back.

But even so, given the opportunity to do it all over again, Subaru intends to use it to choose a better future than the world that came before. It's difficult to appreciate a thing like Return by Death, but without that ability, he would have had to live on in one of those countless abysmal futures. But,

Subaru: "Even if I can repeat it indefinitely... with every return my relationships will worsen. The difficulty will increase along with the number of times I respawn... That's a first, alright."

At this point, it was still possible to establish rational communication with Garfiel. But next time, when the stench is compounded over again, he couldn't be certain whether he will still be granted an opportunity to speak.

At least, recalling the memory of Rem stealing away his life with her morning star when she could no longer trust him as a result of the stench still left him a lonely sense of emptiness on the left side of his body.

Remembering those he left in the mansion— especially remembering the sleeping Rem, the next thought that came into Subaru's mind was the assassin in black. The reappearance of that happy murderer with her lethal blade, who currently tops the high-score chart of this world for the "Subaru Kill Count".

Incidentally, also sharing first-place was the gray cat-shaped Spirit, while the whole flock of people sharing second-place with the kill-count of one was just too many to keep track of.

Subaru: “Now that I think about it, it’s kinda like an inverted kill-counter. Or I guess a «getting-killed-counter» would be more appropriate here...? Anyway, I need to find a countermeasure against Elsa. If it comes down to a brawl there’s no way I can win, so the only practical fighting strength we have would be a pick between Roswaal or Garfiel.”

Roswaal, even with his magical abilities, was still hindered by his injuries. So in the end, the best solution would still be to convert Garfiel into an ally.

And in order to have Garfiel fight off Elsa when she attacks the mansion, Subaru must break the barrier surrounding the Sanctuary. And so, the most important steps would be,

Subaru: “Pass through the Trials and liberate the Sanctuary before the attack on the mansion, reconcile with Garfiel and bring him to the mansion to repel Elsa to get to the *medetai owari*⁸⁴... or something like that?”

Saying it over to himself, Subaru saw the mutually contradictory problem and furrowed his brows.

In order to make peace with Garfiel, he must liberate the Sanctuary.

And in order to liberate the Sanctuary, he must get past Garfiel so he could challenge the Trials.

Neither of these conflicting points can be satisfied without the other. Perhaps there was still the possibility of resolving this through words, but looking back on their conversations last night and his experience of their interactions up to now, the slimness of that possibility made him want to clutch at his head.

For better or for worse, interactions with Garfiel are straight-forward, but it also means that once he’s set his mind on something, it would be very difficult to change it again. Therefore, if there was any chance left for Subaru, it would be,

⁸⁴ English flip. Means “happy ending” (めでたい終わり), originally “ハッピーエンド” (happy end).

Subaru: “Aim for an opportunity to sneak into the Tomb and get in touch with Echidna, or sneak into the Tomb at the time to challenge the Trials, and break through the remainder of the Trials.”

Finishing up washing his face at the pond, Subaru arrived at this conclusion, and turned his steps towards a direction quite different from the cooking grounds.

Wiping his face with the squeezed-dry towel, he set his destination toward a sparsely populated end of the Sanctuary. Heading there, passing a small hill, and continuing down a single road—

Subaru: “...Right, I was expecting too much with my opportunism, wasn't I?”

In the middle of the clearly visible path leading straight to the Tomb, seated in the same posture as the previous night, Garfiel was waiting.

—Head to the Tomb first thing in the morning and sneak past Garfiel when he isn't looking.

He thought he'd pull a free one first thing in the morning, but looks like that's been instantly foiled.

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Subaru: “You look energetic this morning.”

Garfiel: “I should be th'one sayin' that. The hell are ya doin' showin' up here first thing in the mornin? Y'tryin' to piss me off? Oy!”

Subaru raised his hand a little to say hi, and Garfiel, looking annoyed, opened one of his eyes and spat this back. Seeing that expected reaction, Subaru dropped down his hand again, and turned to the petite figure— Ryuzu, standing beside the cross-legged Garfiel.

Subaru: “I figured Garfiel would be here, but I didn't expect to find Ryuzu-san here as well. Good morning.”

Ryuzu: “Mnn, it is a nice morning. Is Su-bo out for a stroll too?”

Subaru: "I guess you can call it that, but it's not as pleasant as it sounds. I came here full of hopes, you know, but also to annoy Garfiel."

Garfiel: "You..."

Seeing blue veins pop up on Garfiel's forehead, and Subaru just pretending not to notice his reaction, Ryuzu tilted her head. Then,

Subaru: "You said «too» just now, does that mean Ryuzu-san's out for a stroll too?"

Ryuzu: "The stroll's just an added bonus for me. Last night I heard Gar-bo hadn't come home and was just going to sit out here on the ground... So I wanted to see how he's doing."

Ryuzu said this while playing with her long, pink wavy hair with a finger. In her other hand, she was holding a little package, which, judging from its size and shape, must be packing some simple food inside. Most likely, that was the stubborn not-gonna-move Garfel's breakfast.

Suddenly, Subaru touched a hand to his chin and looked at the two in turn,

Subaru: "Then, Garfiel and Ryuzu-san, have you guys known each other for a long time?"

Ryuzu: "Ever since Gar-bo was little, at least... Well, he's still little."

Garfiel: "Oy, Granny. I've already way overtaken your height here."

Ryuzu: "And you still haven't grown any taller like you're supposed to. Anyways, we've been together since he was a lot smaller than he is now. I've even found myself growing used to these exchanges."

Even with Garfiel's protests, Ryuzu seemed to accept them without paying them much mind. Underneath what seemed to be a little girl was indeed an old woman inside. A total loli-granny in every sense of the word.

However, having noticed something from what she said just now, Subaru raised up his brows,

Subaru: "From the way you said that... was Garfiel not born inside the Sanctuary?"

Garfiel: "...Don't go pryin' where y'don't need to. Y'wanna be like «Sneak attackin' the black Botokku only t'get killed instead?»?"

Subaru: "Yeah that didn't really communicate at all so there's not much stopping power there. So, Ryuzu-san, tell me the answer, if you please!"

Seeing Subaru intent on completely ignoring last night's warning, Garfiel ground his teeth so hard that they were almost starting to make a noise. But Subaru ignored that too and kept trying to get to the bottom of it.

Looking back and forth at what was going on between the two men, Ryuzu spilled out a tired sigh, and,

Ryuzu: "It was ten and something years ago when Gar-bo came to the Sanctuary. Back then, Gar-bo was still a lil'baby that couldn't even walk yet. Ros-bo brought him along and..."

Garfiel: "—Granny, don't say anythin' unnecessary beyond that."

Narrowing his eyes, Garfiel pressed down his voice as he said this.

Hearing this sent a chill into Subaru's chest, and for a moment, he was afraid that he may have carelessly stepped on something he shouldn't have. But,

Ryuzu: "Who're you talking to with that kind of mouth, you idiot!"

Garfiel: "Hurts!"

Striding forward impressively, Ryuzu reached out her hand and smacked the golden spiky-haired Garfiel right in the head. Under the little girl's arms that didn't seem all that strong, Garfiel hugged his head as if thunderbolts were dropping down on him, and, looking up at her like this,

Garfiel: "G-granny what're y'doin' all of'a sudden..."

Ryuzu: "I should be asking you, after raising you up myself is that how you're gonna speak to me? Just, shameful, embarrassing, so sad it makes me wanna cry. Take this! This! This!"

Garfiel: "Sto-, hurts, aow, watchin', there's someone watchin'!"

With “pok pok pok” sound effects, Ryuzu kept swinging her arm while Garfiel, looking like he wanted to crawl into a hole, tried to block her blows with his hand.

While watching those two going at it, Subaru almost couldn’t stop himself from laughing,

Subaru: “I think I’ve got a pretty good estimate of how long and deep your relationship is now.... Garfiel, do you really plan to keep sitting here?”

Garfiel: “Unless there’s somethin’ else I need to do, I’m here t’stay. I wouldn’t want someone sneakin’ in while I’m away, now do I?”

Guarding against anyone sneaking in, even with Subaru trying to get him to let his guard down, Garfiel would not budge. Since Subaru wasn’t expecting too much, he wasn’t entirely discouraged. Rather, the fact that Garfiel had overturned his own words from only half a day ago meant there was probably a need for Subaru to revise his understanding of Garfiel.

But in any case, the fact that his stubbornness remained difficult to move hadn’t changed.

Subaru: “Come to think of it, doesn’t the Trial only take place at night? There’s no point for me to sneak in during the day anyway. Isn’t it kinda pointless to keep sitting here like this?”

Garfiel: “Yer wastin’ yer breath if y’think I’m gonna move. Wanna sneak in durin’ the day and wait for th’night, bankin’ on me not bein’ able to go in and then yer all set, yeah? Y’think I ain’t ready for a long fight? What, y’underestimin’ me?”

Subaru: “Tch, I’ve been found out?”

Subaru held up both hands over his head to surrender, and, seeing him do this, Garfiel snorted, before looking up at Ryuzu,

Garfiel: “So, I can’t be movin’ from here for a while. Granny, food.”

Ryuzu: “Is that the kind of attitude you take toward someone who went to all the trouble of bringing you food? Lamentable. Here.”

Despite her complaints, Ryuzu handed him the parcel. And, taking it, Garfiel unwrapped the parcel and started filling himself up with the dumpling-like contents inside.

With Ryuzu helping him like this, it would seem the battle of wills could be a long one.

Subaru: “Looks like it’ll be hard to do anything for the moment... Huh. Oh well, I’ll come back next time.”

Garfiel: “Y’don’t have to come back y’know. I ain’t lettin’ ya through anyway. Y’might as well go sit quietly in a corner somewhere, yeah?”

Having finished eating, Garfiel licked his fingers and called out to Subaru, who was turning to leave. Subaru waved him goodbye without turning around, and Ryuzu followed along beside him.

Ryuzu: “Now that I’m done feedin’ Gar-bo, I want to talk to Su-bo for a bit.”

Subaru: “What a coincidence. I have something I want to ask Ryuzu-san too. Though I really want to go see Emilia-tan’s face first, but...”

Looking up at the sky, he found that the sun had only just risen.

He could still remember that on the first day after the beginning of the Trials, the exhausted Emilia will wake up around noon. He would have liked to follow his desires and go to see her face while she slept, but he should probably move forward with the other activities here instead.

Subaru cast a glance towards Ryuzu, observing the elderly little girl with pink wavy hair who was walking along beside him.

Her face seemed a little sleepy, and with wobbling little steps, she managed to keep up with his pace. Even knowing full well that she’s a loli-granny, there was still something that tickled the insides of his heart.

Subaru: “Want me to give you a piggyback ride?”

Ryuzu: “...And here I was wondering why you were suddenly looking at me like that. Su-bo, you don’t happen to be attracted to little girls, do you? That’d be even more hopeless than Ros-bo.”

Subaru: “Please don’t mistake me for a *lolicon*! When I buy *gyaru gemus* I’d use all my *keikenchi*⁸⁵ to conquer *senpai* or *onee-san*⁸⁶ type characters! And even right now, I’m desperately working my ass off for an older sister type, you know... Although I just recently found out she’s quite a lot older than me, but my heart has not changed! That’s the kinda guy I am, you know?”

Ryuzu: “What kind of guy is that... I almost wanted to ask, but nevermind. No, I don’t need a piggyback. If I don’t walk around a bit my old legs and hips will go weak.”

Subaru: “Another incredible statement demonstrating the appearance-gap!”

Once again, it seriously hit him that underneath the appearance of a little girl was really an elderly lady. There was also the possibility that while her skin was young, all her organs inside were creaking. Being a loli-granny must be surprisingly tough.

Ryuzu: “What is that, you look like you’re thinking of something stupid again.”

Subaru: “Ehhh? No way, really? I was totally making a poker face just now and being careful not to reveal my inner thoughts, you know.”

Ryuzu: “Your face looks just like Gar-bo’s when he’s chompin’ on stolen pastries. No matter which child it is, children are always up to the same things.”

Subaru: “This granny just keeps dishing out her old granny antics one after another, huh.”

Setting the endless reminders of Ryuzu’s age aside, Subaru, walking alongside her, suddenly began looking around him, “Huh?”

Subaru: “It’s good that... we got a chance to talk, but, where are we going? Actually, it’s pretty late for me to ask this now, but after you lent your bed to Emilia-tan, where has Ryuzu-san been sleeping? In the wild?”

⁸⁵ Engrish flip. Means “experience points (in video games)” (経験値), originally “選別ポイント” (selection points).

⁸⁶ Girls that are older or have that big ara-ara big sister aura.

Ryuzu: “So I just loaned my home out and you’re immediately treating me like I’m homeless... The fact that you’d say that tells me you might’ve forgotten that I am still the head of this place. I still know a few people who’d let me stay over for a few days.”

Subaru: “Yeah, that’s right. It’s only been a few days, but the people here are all unexpectedly nice people.”

Recalling the scene at the cooking grounds, and the various occasions when he got to interact with the Sanctuary’s residents, Subaru furrowed his brows, and couldn’t help but wonder if the brewing conflict Garfiel had warned about hadn’t just been an exaggeration.

Stealing a glance at Subaru, who had grown silent, Ryuzu nodded, “Hm”,

Ryuzu: “Something doesn’t sit well with you?”

Subaru: “No, not if you say it like that... How should I say this, it’s a bit different from what I imagined? Judging from the way Emilia was treated at the Capital, half-bloods couldn’t have been treated much better. So I thought maybe the half-bloods would be harboring some complicated feelings toward the pure-bloods.”

At least, despite being trapped in a Sanctuary referred to as the Experimental Grounds, the faces of the residents didn’t seem to be showing particularly dark emotions. Of course, there must be those who didn’t find this amusing, but Subaru hadn’t caught any glimpse of such negative feelings here so far.

If Garfiel, who didn’t mince words nor emotions, was any indication, his personal emotions seemed closer to indignation than anger. An anger on behalf of others, rather than himself.

Despite their unpleasant surroundings, the morale of the residents was exceedingly high. More than incredible, it was almost to the point of being inconceivable.

In front of Subaru’s doubts, Ryuzu’s eyes widened in surprise,

Ryuzu: “What, Su-bo, you may not look like it, but you have more ideas than you let on.”

Subaru: “I don’t look like it... that part’s pretty unnecessary, isn’t it... I mean, I’m confident that I look more intellectual than Garfiel, at least. But, well, I guess I’m pretty thoughtless when it comes to all sort of things.”

Ryuzu: “It’s quite a virtue to be aware of your own shortcomings. You can only begin to improve once you’ve realized where you are deficient... Ah, we’re here.”

Coming to a split in the path, Ryuzu led the way for the lost-looking Subaru. Instead of heading in the direction of the cathedral and Roswaal’s residence, they turned towards the other end of the village outskirts, opposite from the Tomb—and there, they arrived at Ryuzu’s isolated temporary lodging.

Unlike the sparsely placed houses scattered over the outskirts, for some reason, this house stood alone, far apart from all the others. A word naturally came to Subaru’s mind,

Subaru: “It’s too lonely, isn’t it? Why are you staying in a place like this?”

Ryuzu: “It can’t be helped. Right now, this is the only building inside the Sanctuary with no one living in it. It may be far away from the center of the village, but it’s spacious, and I quite like it here.”

Subaru: “Didn’t you say you know people who’d let you stay over? Why did you choose to live alone? Even though I know quite a few loli-grannies in my life, it’s still way too sad for me to see a loli-granny die alone.”

Ryuzu: “I honestly can’t tell if you’re concerned for me or if I’m being made fun of. Here, come in. I’ll brew you some tea. Though Ram certainly brews it better.”

Subaru: “No matter what kind of leaves you put in it there, it’ll still just taste like leaves, so no worries.”

Ryuzu: “You should be more careful about the kinds of things you say.”

With a sigh, Ryuzu invited Subaru into the house through the opened door. It was a large building, about half the size of Roswaal’s temporary residence. In fact, divided into three rooms, it seemed perhaps too large for just one person to live in.

Finding a chair to sit down in and looking all around the room, he saw that the interior of the small room was simple and well maintained. Ryuzu had said that no one else lived here, but,

Subaru: “For a house that’s not been lived in, it sure feels like someone often comes here. Even for me, being a top-notch bed-maker myself, I’d have to grant the fluffiness of that bed a passing grade... There’s no way Ryuzu-san did that.”

Ryuzu: “What’re you doing with that «Ryuzu spends her time coming here ever and whenever she wants to alone, then lies there idly waiting for the heat to cool off» face yer got.”

Subaru: “That must be an awfully specific facial expression I got!”

Still, there was something sad about the possibility that the reason she came up with this rapid-fire explanation was that it was something she had thought about before. He was joking just now when he mentioned dying alone, but it can’t be denied that something about her matched his impression of a solitary old lady.

Silently turning away and occupying herself with brewing tea, her back seemed almost lonely. Seeing this, Subaru looked around trying to find some way to change the topic.

The room was clean and neatly organized. There was a slightly dulled mirror above a dresser. A flower vase without flowers, and two metal shields hanging on the wall. —Shields?

Subaru: “Why are there shields here? And two of them?”

Ryuzu: “They’re Gar-bo’s. That kid’s using this place like it’s a storage house.”

Subaru: “So he hangs around here too, huh. It does kinda look like a good hangout spot for delinquents now that I think about it... But, he couldn’t be the one carefully tidying up this place, could he?”

That’d be way too out-of-character, Subaru murmured under his breath as he looked at Garfiel’s shields.

He often saw crossed swords adorning the walls of noblemen’s houses in manga, and these shields were slightly tilted in a fashion similar to that as well. But, unlike something that ought to be used as ornaments, these shields were riddled with scratches and dents, and were certainly not mere antiques that have not seen a day of battle.

Subaru: “Then again, what kind of battle can you fight with just shields?”

Ryuzu: “Back in the day, they would always fight bouts with these shields in the fields outside this house. Each one would hold a shield, and round and round they’d go, bumping into each other.”

Subaru: “That sounds a bit dangerous for just playing around... Mind if I ask who it was that Garfiel played with?”

Over the time he spent in the Sanctuary, he hadn’t met anyone who could have been so intimate with Garfiel. Of course, being an important person in these lands, it was apparent that Garfiel had good relations with the residents at the cooking grounds. But, other than that, did he have anyone he was truly close with? Subaru couldn’t think of any particular names.

If he had to name someone, it would have been Ryuzu. But just picturing Ryuzu holding a shield and charging against Garfiel felt incredibly dangerous.

For a while, Ryuzu stayed silent in front of Subaru’s question. She brought over two cups of steaming tea set on a tray, and handed Subaru one of them as she sat down on the bed. Receiving it, Subaru took a sip while it was still hot, and moistened his throat.

Subaru: “Right, tastes just like leaves.”

Ryuzu: “Tea’s just wasted on you, huh. Well, I already anticipated that, so I used the cheaper leaves... Even tea leaves are considered precious here, you know.”

About once a month, Roswaal would send over precious items and luxury goods here. Subaru, adapting to the situation, did his best to pretend to appreciate the tea, as they sat wordlessly tilting their cups for a while.

Then, after some time had passed in silence,

Subaru: “—Frederica.”

Hearing Subaru’s abrupt whisper, Ryuzu’s shoulder jumped a little. Lifting her gaze from her teacup, she looked at Subaru. And, seeing something wavering in her expression, Subaru asked again,

Subaru: “The name of the person who bumped shields with Garfiel, is Frederica, isn’t it?”

Ryuzu: “...Did you hear that from Gar-bo?”

Subaru: “Nah. I pieced it together from some fragmented conversations and got a feeling about it somehow. At least, I just knew that there must’ve been something complicated between Garfiel and Frederica.”

At Roswaal’s mansion, Frederica had warned him to beware of a man named Garfiel.

And when Garfiel heard Frederica’s name, his expression changed, and he wanted to know how she was. It would be hard not to suspect that there was something between them. And, most of all,

Subaru: “Their fangs are way too similar. If they’re still unrelated, even Buddha wouldn’t allow that.”

Ryuzu: “...Ahh, quite so. Even I can’t think of a way to deny that.”

Faced with this decisive fact, Ryuzu let out a sigh as if giving up.

In terms of similarities between Garfiel and Frederica, just their vicious fang-filled smiles alone would have been enough. At least, it would be enough to tell that they were not in a romantic relationship or anything like that. If he had to guess, then their relationship must be—

Subaru: “Brother and sister... Actually, more like older sister and younger brother. If I were to guess who’s older, Frederica seems more like the older sister type.”

Ryuzu: “Goodness... I’m impressed that you’d be able to tell all that just from intuition.”

Hearing Subaru point this out, Ryuzu could only show her amazement.

Then, nodding her head thoughtfully, and placing the remainder of her tea back on the tray, she corrected her posture, and,

Ryuzu: “Just as Su-bo imagined, the owner of these two shields are the siblings Frederica and Garfiel. Frederica Baumann, who had left the Sanctuary, and Garfiel Tinsel, are family bound by blood.”

Confirming Subaru’s speculation, Ryuzu nonetheless spilled a melancholic sigh.

Ryuzu: “—And now, owing to their mutual misunderstandings, they have each wound up on diverging paths.”

Arc 4 Chapter 29 - An Omnivorous Man

Has been cut from the Light Novel Adaptation

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

Closing in on the core of what he wanted to know, Subaru tilted his teacup.

Letting the hot tea pass down his throat, he swallowed it along with his doubts for now and settled them into his stomach. Then, seriously considering what he should say next,

Subaru: “To what extent... are you willing to answer my questions?”

Ryuzu: “...You may have already noticed my reluctance, but don’t expect too much from me. Because of my Contract, there is not much information I can give Su-bo. As for the Trials, I am under strict orders not to allow any outside interference with the Tomb.”

Subaru: “The way you said that already gave me a few clues... Strict orders, huh.”

Ryuzu: “———”

Faced with Subaru’s repeated questions, Ryuzu grew silent.

Judging by her words and behaviors so far, there weren’t many contenders for someone capable of bending her to their will. More than likely, those were Roswaal’s orders, but,

Subaru: “In that case, that guy’s objectives just becomes less and less comprehensible. Does he want me... want us to pass the Trials? Or doesn’t he? I can’t even be sure whether he’s planning to help us or not.”

Ryuzu: “I guess he was hoping you would find the answer to that yourselves, or something along those lines. Even back in the day, Ros-bo was a naughty little child who loved to do things in these obscure and roundabout ways. He may have gotten taller, but deep down, he hasn’t changed a bit.”

Perhaps it was because they’ve known each other for so long, that Ryuzu could lightheartedly say this of the young Roswaal.

“Hasn’t changed a bit”— Having only gotten to know Roswaal’s perverted side, Subaru couldn’t help but shudder at the thought of what Roswaal might’ve been like back when his limbs were still stubby.

Subaru: “Well, there must still be some cuteness left in there, mnnyeah, probably maybe.”

Ryuzu: “Ros-bo’s childhood... Hm, since they pertain to the secrets of the Mathers family, I’m afraid I cannot divulge anything further.”

Subaru: “Uuuogh, but I’m interested... No, wait, am I interested? I don’t really mind not knowing too much about that guy’s personality, actually.”

Crossing his arms and tilting his head, Subaru started to question why he wanted to know in the first place, and,

Subaru: “Alright, let’s toss that one out. I just need to know what that guy’s planning, there’s no need to understand him.”

Ryuzu: “You sure came to that conclusion easily.”

Subaru: “There’s no need to worry about things that’re pointless to worry about. Ultimately, humans can’t understand everything from zero to a hundred anyway. But even so, we still want to understand some things, and I guess that’s what love is. I’ll always love Emilia-tan, but I don’t love Roswaal all that much!”

In front of that clear-cut declaration tossing Roswaal aside, Ryuzu gave an impressed nod, and continuing “In that case”, she touched her hand to her chin,

Ryuzu: “It seems, there is no other topic I can talk to you about...”

Subaru: “Naah, as long as we don’t touch on anything forbidden by Ryuzu-san’s Contracts, my question *jikan*⁸⁷ is still ongoing, isn’t it? Nevermind Roswaal’s personality for now, but I still want to ask a few more things from the Sanctuary’s all-knowledgeable granny Ryuzu-san.”

Ryuzu: “Hmm... Well, if you just wanna ask, that’s fine, go ahead and ask. But, the dire consequences of violating my Contract are not limited to myself alone. By no means forget this, understood?”

Bending forward, the little girl glared up threateningly at Subaru.

Honestly, it looked so adorable that it gave off no sense of pressure at all, but Subaru nonetheless hugged his own shoulders pretending to shudder in reaction, and whimpered out “So scary”, with tears puddling up in his eyes,

Subaru: “Alright, now that we have the scary aggressor and the frightened victim properly mapped out, it’s question *jun*⁸⁸ now?”

Ryuzu: “I’m finding it a bit hard to accept the way you made me the villain just now.”

Subaru: “As a man once said, that’s that and this is this. So, question now— You said that Frederica and Garfiel are siblings, and Frederica had stayed inside the Sanctuary, right?”

While Ryuzu was still a bit unable to accept her treatment, with a feigned smile, Subaru cut directly into the main topic. Seeing her expression change upon hearing his question, Subaru waved a finger,

Subaru: “Frederica, who was supposed to be in the Sanctuary, is now dressed in a maid’s uniform and serving in Roswaal’s mansion. But, from what I’ve gathered, this situation sounds a bit odd.”

Ryuzu: “Hmm, odd how?”

Subaru: “If Frederica is Garfiel’s sister, then she must be half-blooded as well. Then, being a half-blood, she shouldn’t have been able to leave the Sanctuary for as long as the barrier is still intact.”

The barrier of the Sanctuary that reacts to the blood of the half-bloods, barring their escape.

⁸⁷ English flip. Means “time” (時間), originally “タイム” (time).

⁸⁸ English flip. Means “turn/time for” (順), originally “ターン” (turn).

It was the thing that struck Emilia unconscious on the way in, that kept Garfiel and Ryuzu trapped in this place indefinitely, and it was the wall that was currently one of the greatest obstacles standing in Subaru's path.

After agonizingly trying to find a way to surmount it, there was now an exception who had passed beyond that wall. In other words,

Subaru: "There must be some kind of secret path to leave the barrier. Or maybe, even the barrier's existence is a lie."

Ryuzu: "A lie... That would be a bit upsetting. The truth is, in my life up to now, I have never once set foot into the outside world. All this is owing to the existence of the barrier."

Subaru: "Or, maybe you are being deceived by the Contract you've been bound to... Such a malicious possibility isn't entirely out of the question? It could also be that since there's too much risk involved in actually testing the reality of the barrier, it just so happens that no one thought to verify it. But then..."

The possibility that all the residents of the Sanctuary had been deceived about the existence of the barrier.

The Trials inside the Tomb certainly exist, so this should be highly unlikely. Yet Subaru couldn't completely rule out the possibility that this was some overly elaborate plan to trap the refugees of Arlam and win Emilia renown.

Subaru: "Considering the kind of uproar there'd be if they found out about the truth, it's just a bit too unrealistic. So the second possibility should be automatically ruled out... which only leaves us with the first one."

Ryuzu: "A secret path... Is it. But, what will you do once you have found out the answer?"

Subaru: "If there is a secret path that anyone could use, then we can just move everyone in the Sanctuary outside the barrier, and there'll be no need to take the Trials."

Hearing Subaru's outrageous proposal, Ryuzu dropped her jaw. Seeing her like this, Subaru waved his hands from side to side, "Right?"

Subaru: “Sure there are benefits to taking the Trials as well. Honestly, having benefitted quite a bit from it myself, I won’t deny that. But, the Trials—or in this case, the past... It’d be ok to put it off for now, right? There are times when people shouldn’t be forced to face their pasts, don’t you think?”

Ryuzu: “You are talking about Emilia-sama? But hardships will not choose the right time to pay their visit. Running away now in the face of calamities would only be...”

Subaru: “I don’t mean running away forever. Just retreating in order to better prepare for the fight. That’s what they call a tactical retreat. There are times when we have to fight on unfavorable ground, but moving to more favorable grounds when possible is a good thing for both the person herself and those around her, isn’t it?”

Cutting off Ryuzu just as she tried to say something, Subaru continued stacking on justifications for running away, insisting that it isn’t always shameful to turn one’s back.

Subaru: “Even if she doesn’t face it now, one day Emilia will face it, no matter what. It may be ironic, but that Trial made her remember. So she must now choose to either forget or to accept it. And all I can do is to somehow make it less painful for her when she decides.”

Ryuzu: “...You speak of distancing her from suffering, yet you would not let her run away from the single most painful part.”

Subaru: “Whether to run away from that part is her choice as well. But I believe that she... Emilia will not do such a thing.”

Ryuzu: “And what makes you trust her so? At least, it’s impossible for me. To see the way she came out of the Tomb, and still have such expectations of her.”

Subaru: “Well, that’s because I love Emilia-tan to death, you know.”

As Ryuzu continued to deny Emilia, Subaru casually said this as if it were nothing.

And though Ryuzu had already found herself speechless several times throughout this conversation, these last words left her the most awestruck up to this point. Watching Ryuzu’s astonished face, Subaru smiled awkwardly, and scratched at his neck.

Subaru: “I love Emilia, and I think she’s super cute. So, I believe that this super-cute girl I fell for is the kind of girl who will overcome anything, no matter how hard or painful it may be. I expect and expect and expect this of her, and I believe that she will meet my expectations.”

Ryuzu: “Th... that isn’t an answer at all. No matter how much you like someone, there is nothing you can do about what is inside the other person’s heart. Su-bo, surely you know this...”

Subaru: “I do understand. Emilia is a girl. Not all parts of her are strong, and there are super small parts of her that are weak, and there might even be a chance that there’s a super-super-impossibly-small ugly part in there as well.”

Ryuzu: “Are you admitting there is or not...”

Subaru: “If I believe... that in spite of all her weak parts, it will be her strong parts that will shine through in the end... then that’s what devotion is, isn’t it?”

Inscribed into Subaru’s heart was the belief that devotion was the strongest expression of love. And he had tasted the happiness of being on the receiving end of someone devoting her entire being to him as well. Therefore,

Subaru: “I will do anything for Emilia. I believe she will overcome her weak parts and find the strength to lift up her head, and I will work hard for that future where I get to rub it in everyone’s faces that I was right to believe in her.”

Ryuzu: “...But even so, she is the one who will be facing the most painful part of her heart, alone.”

Subaru: “But that’s obvious, isn’t it? I can’t be at Emilia’s side when she faces her past. If I existed in her past, I’d take her hand while she’s sitting on the ground crying and pull her back up, and do everything I can to cheer her up. But I’m not there. What happened in her past had nothing to do with me. As much as I want to reach out my hand, it’s like someone watching a drama having no way to interfere with what’s happening on TV.”

That was the truth. The past was the past, and no one could touch it.

Even the past that Subaru had faced and overcome, was only a fiction. He hadn’t conveyed a single thing to his real parents, and all he had gained was some sense of self-satisfaction. But,

Subaru: “Compared to getting no bonus at all, it’s definitely better to get at least a little bonus. I can’t help her face her past while I’m stuck in the real world. But, her present self can lend her own insufficient past self a hand, couldn’t it? Lending yourself a hand isn’t against the rules, is it?”

Ryuzu: “———”

Subaru: “Even if I can’t help her directly, I’ll use my words and actions and affection and... Well, I’d be really happy if I could have the highest place in Emilia’s heart, but she’s received all sorts of things from other people as well. At least, she has more now than the Emilia of the past. The more weapons she has at her disposal, the more she will be able to help her imperfect past. That’s how we can beat this Trial. The Trial’s difficulty was set based upon this premise, wasn’t it.”

Having experienced this first-hand, Subaru could say this again no matter how many times he was asked.

Subaru: “I will help Emilia. I will do everything in my power to help her present self overcome her past. And in order to achieve that goal, even if it means taking side paths or throwing caution out the window or cheating or paying real money for in-game credits, I will do it. That’s how I intend to help her.”

Ryuzu: “Really... That sure is a self-centered way to love someone.”

Subaru: “I’m no herbivore or carnivore, you can just call me an omnivorous guy—!”

Snapping his fingers and sparkling his teeth with a wink, Subaru stuck up his thumb and struck out a pose. Watching Subaru abruptly ending his speech like this, Ryuzu exhaled a long, long sigh as if giving up altogether.

Ryuzu: “That sure was a lot of pretty words for making an excuse for doing something sneaky.”

Subaru: “Heheh.”

Ryuzu: “Gobbledygook... I’m sorry, but I cannot tell you the details of the side path. However, I can tell you that it’s impossible to rely on it alone. The way Frederica left the Sanctuary was an exception. The others cannot do the same.”

Ryuzu shook her head and turned down Subaru’s hopes. Subaru’s heart dropping at her words, his shoulders slumping and his knees falling to the floor— Didn’t really happen. Instead,

Subaru: “Oh. Can’t do it huh. I was thinking it’d be a great deal if that could work, but I guess it’s ok. Then, onto the next question...”

Ryuzu: “This might be a bit funny coming from me, but you sure don’t like to give up, Su-bo.”

Subaru: “If I gave up that easily, who knows how many times I would’ve had to sit in the Whale’s stomach by now. It’s a bit funny for me to say this too, but never giving up and the depth of my love are pretty much the only weapons I have, you know.”

Subaru came out and announced his uselessness, and once again, Ryuzu only stood there stumped just as she had been many times already in the past hour. Subaru had to clap his hands with “Snap out’ of it”,

Subaru: “Even though I have all sorts of problems with this, I still realize that having Emilia reveal her true powers and smash right through the Trials would be the most epic-heroic way to do it. So, does the *Furudanuki Chousensha*⁸⁹ of the Trials, Ryuzu-san, have some insider advice?”

Ryuzu: “Why do I get the feeling I’ve just been called something I’d rather not be called... And even if you ask me, I could only tell you that I don’t know. I’ve never taken the Trials, after all, so I couldn’t possibly know the answer to that.”

Subaru: “Wuh?”

Tilting his head, Subaru let out a stupid groan in front of Ryuzu’s reply. But surely, just now, he had heard something he couldn’t let slide. After all,

Subaru: “Just now, might you perhaps have just enlightened me with the revelation that you have never taken the Trials?”

Ryuzu: “What’s with that polite-speak all of a sudden. It’s obvious, isn’t it? I am not allowed to challenge the Trials meant for those from outside the Sanctuary. It’s the same for the others too. At least, in the seventy years I have spent here, I have no knowledge of anyone attempting the Trials. Su-bo was the first.”

⁸⁹ English flip. Means “Veteran Challenger” (古狸挑戦者), originally “ベテラン『試練』チャレンジャー” (Veteran Trial Challenger).

Subaru: “Nonononoweirdweirdweird. Hold on, pause, wait, something’s weird all the information’s messed up. Please just gimme some time to balance the books in my head for a moment.”

Ryuzu: “You got five minutes.”

Gratefully nodding to Ryuzu’s unexpected patience, Subaru held his fingers to his temples and began desperately calling back his memories.

From the day before yesterday in the previous loop, up to the point when he first came back after passing the Trials, chewing over every minutest detail within his memory over that time,

Subaru: “—Wha?”

In those memories, the inconsistencies that shouldn’t have been there, he hadn’t noticed them until now. His face contorting as he realized this fact, Subaru tried hard to contain the doubtful mutterings under his breath. What’s going on?

But once the emerging suspicion had sprouted, there was nothing to stop it from taking root and flowering atop its stems. In Subaru’s memories, Ryuzu said on the night before the Trials,

—No one had ever taken the Trials up to now. In the span of her entire life up to this point, there had never been a challenger.

In Subaru’s memories, immediately before and immediately after the Trials, Ryuzu said,

—She had taken the Trials, failed to pass, but was still kicking around safe and sound, offering it as proof that there was no harm in challenging the Trials.

In the span of a single day, her statements had completely turned on its head.

It’d be a different matter if this was purely in emotional terms, but the contradicting contents pertained to life experiences and reality itself. Such a drastic directional change in information could only be pointing to perjury, or otherwise, a precalculated lie.

Still maintaining his thinking posture, Subaru turned his gaze up toward Ryuzu, who was playing with her pink hair, waiting. Watching her sitting on the bed, swinging her legs that weren’t long enough to touch

the floor, looking as though she was searching for something to distract herself from boredom, one could almost forget that she was a granny at heart and mistake her for a genuine little girl.

Looking back on their interactions up to now, he really didn't want to believe that she had been maliciously toying with him, but,

Subaru: "Even if some part of it was true, which ones can I believe?"

Usually, when faced with conflicting information, Subaru would just trust the words of those he wanted to trust, but he couldn't make this judgment so lightly when it was Emilia's fate resting on his decision. And much less so, considering this was a matter of life and death in the literal sense of the words. He must be cautious.

This was now the third time he and Ryuzu had discussed the topic of the Trials.

Once, she claimed to have challenged it, and twice, she denied any knowledge of anyone ever having taken it. Though this wasn't something that could be decided by majority, her statements claiming that she knew nothing of the Trials seemed to be more believable.

Following from that assumption, she may have lied about the Trials to the worried Subaru out of consideration, just to put his mind at ease. But if that was the case, then she should have simply explained that it was a lie—

Subaru: "Unless there was some reason she didn't do this... Maybe she's starting to go senile..."

Ryuzu: "Just now, you seem to have arrived at some rather rude conclusions about me?"

Subaru: "If you could keep in mind my consistent past efforts to demonstrate my good intentions, and let that counterbalance my recent transgression, Subaru will be most grateful. Said Subaru with a stern expression on his face."

Watching Subaru mix his apologizing and clowning together, Ryuzu sighed, and, muttering "Ayeayeaye...", she tiredly shook her head,

Ryuzu: "So, did you get any answers out of that conversation with your heart?"

Subaru: “Answer or not, it’s more like I’ve arrived at a conclusion. Um, Ryuzu-san, did you happen to be worried about me? Like back outside the Tomb?”

Ryuzu: “Worried?”

Seeing Ryuzu merely repeating his word like a parrot, Subaru nodded, and effeminately touched his fingertips together like a girl, and,

Subaru: “Y-you once said that you never took the Trials, but outside the Tomb you told me how you took the Trials and failed but it was no big deal, right? B-but you probably just said that because you were worried about me or unless it’s not like that and it’s just me but I just noticed it just now that’s all...”⁹⁰”

Ryuzu: “—Ahh, so it’s about that.”

With a voice carrying an emotion as if having understood, Ryuzu interjected into Subaru’s cringe-worthy rapid-fire delivery. And, seeing Subaru furrow his brows in astonishment upon hearing the sound of her voice, she smiled, and,

Ryuzu: “Su-bo, I’ll let you in on something good. Consider it special.”

Subaru: “Something good?”

Ryuzu: “Owing to my Contract, I am forbidden to lie. And so, whenever I am asked an inappropriate question, I could only choose to answer with silence. Without exceptions, this could not be changed for anyone’s sake. Lying is forbidden. Myself included, this is true for every single one of Sanctuary’s residents.”

Subaru: “You cannot... lie...?”

In front of her sudden confession, Subaru’s only impulse was confusion.

Because, if what Ryuzu said was true, then the premise of everything Subaru had considered so far would be turned on its head. Or rather, even before that, if what she said was true, then the whole situation that brought about his suspicions in the first place would have been completely self-contradictory.

⁹⁰ Translation note by Translation Chicken: “said in a girly voice”.

—If she was incapable of lying, then how was it that she had created a situation that couldn't have come about unless she lied?

Subaru: "Tha..."

Ryuzu: "Just now, I have already told the utmost limit of what I could tell you. I cannot answer any questions beyond that. Misery would befall us both if we violate the Contract. If you wish to know more, instead of asking this ancient self who had stopped in her tracks, you should ask one of those who had ventured ahead."

Having been preemptively denied, Subaru could only close his opened mouth and fall back into silence.

Subaru had only been able to carry on this conversation by relying on Ryuzu's goodwill, so once she had rejected him like this, there was nothing he could do. But she had also given him a hint as well.

By picking up that fact alone, Subaru keenly sensed that she had not been lying about her desire to be liberated from this place.

Subaru: "Understood, I won't ask any more than that. Let's change the topic... to something else."

Ryuzu: "You sure're an odd one. You already know you can't get anything else important out of me, and you still wish to drink tea and chat with an old-timer like me?"

Subaru: "I've already missed breakfast time, and there's not much for me to do until Emilia-tan wakes up. I get pissed off just looking at Roswaal, Garfiel bares his fangs at me, and bantering with Otto's way too exhausting, so I'll just deepen my precious friendship with my loli-granny."

Standing up, Subaru collected the two cups of now thoroughly cold tea and headed to the kitchen, followed by Ryuzu's gaze,

Subaru: "Don't worry. For a time, even though it was kinda short-term, I made a living as a servant in Roswaal's mansion, you know. They've taught me a thing or two about brewing tea, at least."

Ryuzu: "Hm. Then allow me to wait with expectations."

Subaru: “Uwa, *seppaku*—⁹¹.”

Saying this as he poured the tea into the teacups, he handed one to Ryuzu and returned to his seat. Facing each other, they sipped down the new tea, and,

Ryuzu: “Not too bad at all.”

Subaru: “Even when I brew it myself, I still just taste leaves. Now, for the new topic.”

Ryuzu: “I won’t be listening if you want to continue the topic from before. But otherwise... Well, I would still respond to any other topics as earnestly as I could.”

Subaru: “Alright, I’ll hold you to your words then.”

Seeing a tinge of guilt forming on Ryuzu’s little face, Subaru’s lips twisted into a mischievous smile.

Subaru: “Do you know anything that bastard Garfiel’s scared of, or any stuff he hates? Like something that’ll make him faint soon as he sees them?”

Ryuzu: “Su-bo... have you ever noticed the way you try so hard is a little crooked?”

And, with that, he managed to put onto Ryuzu’s face the single most peculiar expression of the entire past hour.

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After their conversation over tea came to an end, having cleaned up the cups, Subaru left the lonely loli-granny who claimed she wanted to be alone and came out of the house.

About an hour had passed, or perhaps a little longer, he thought. But, seeing that the sun that was supposed to have only just risen now hanging high up in the sky, and feeling that the temperature had grown warmer as well, it could easily have been longer than that.

⁹¹ Engrish flip. Means "pressure" (切迫), originally "プレッシャー" (pressure).

Judging from bodily sensations alone, it was probably a little after ten o'clock in the morning.

Subaru: "It's a perfect sunny day for drying out a futon too, what a waste... Why do I get the feeling I've completely shed being a *hikikomori*⁹² with that thought just now!"

To think, that bathed under the light of the sun, the first thing that came to his mind was doing laundry. As an archetype of the unhealthy slackers, this was utterly inconceivable. But, setting aside such sentiments for now,

Subaru: "It's about time, Emilia should be waking up soon. She's probably still scared from last night... I better take the chance to imprint some of my sense of presence while she's weak."

Even while muttering this rather devious declaration, deep down, he genuinely worried about Emilia as he sped up his steps. As soon as he could, and for as long as he could, he will stay at her side and comfort her. Because, one way or another—

Subaru: "Tomorrow, I'll have no choice but to leave her side."

This afternoon, Roswaal will formally put forth the proposal to free the refugees of Arlam. Then, if they begin preparations right away, they would be able to depart from the Sanctuary tomorrow.

Subaru will accompany them once again, for there was something he'd have to take care of at the mansion.

Subaru: "If I want to know more, instead of asking someone who had halted their steps, I should be asking someone who had ventured ahead... Geez, that sure was a roundabout way to say it."

Of course, without saying it in this roundabout way, she wouldn't have been able to convey what she wanted to convey. Somewhat pitying her for having to go through all this trouble, Subaru let out a sigh, and sped up his steps once more,

Subaru: "I'll be eagerly waiting to hear your stories about your good-for-nothing little brother and your troublesome hometown, Frederica!"

⁹² Meaning NEET, aka shut-ins that never leave their room.

Arc 4 Chapter 30 - Incongruities on the Road Back Home

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 11, Chapter 1 “Maid, Maid, Maid”, Part 5

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

Roswaal’s proposal— to release the refugees of Arlam.

Like the last time, the proposal itself passed without much resistance. Seeing no point in keeping the refugees in the Sanctuary any longer, it was only natural. But of course, unlike last time, there was no accompanying condition that Subaru should challenge the Trials.

Subaru: “This time I’m totally getting hated on by the guy who came up with that condition, after all...”

Emilia: “What’s wrong, Subaru?”

Subaru: “N—n—no, it’s nothing. Speaking of which, is Emilia-tan feeling better? Have you calmed down a bit? If I’m too much of a nuisance in the room I could go outside if you want?”

Flapping his hand with an awkward smile, Subaru said this to the girl beside him— Emilia.

They were in the bedroom that Ryuzu lent to Emilia, sitting on the side of the bed, and passing the time without talking about anything particularly interesting.

The time was dusk, approaching the fall of night.

After waking up a little before noon, Emilia had some late breakfast before they went to settle the negotiations between Roswaal and Ryuzu on the matter of the refugees. The discussion proceeded without any problems, and they agreed on releasing the refugees the following day, and dissolved their meeting there—

Garfiel: “So, t’sstate the obvious... Emilia-sama’ll be challengin’ the Trials t’night, yeah?”

As if laying down a warning, Garfiel's words didn't leave much room for interpretation.

Pressing down the urge to click his tongue, Subaru stole a glance at Emilia, and, although it was only for a brief moment, he saw on the side of her face a fleeting trace of fear and grief. In fact, he was almost certain that Emilia will fail the Trial tonight.

Unlike Subaru, who had passed the Trial owing to his memories, Emilia's condition ultimately hadn't changed at all. In order for Emilia to pass the Trial, Subaru will have to take actions to create some drastic changes in the environment around her.

Yet, in this loop, Subaru couldn't see a single way to change her environment in such a short period of time. —If she challenges the Trial tonight, it will only be wearing her down.

Subaru: "But she wouldn't breathe a word of complaint or even think of giving up... That's just like Emilia-tan."

In front of Garfiel's provocative question, Emilia hid away that momentary emotion within her eyes, and firmly answered, "Of course I will".

Garfiel narrowed his eyes as if impressed by her reply, and Roswaal quietly whistled, which only added to Subaru's irritation.

But in the end, there was no way to stop this. There were only a few hours left before the start of the Trial tonight.

After ending their talks there, she ate lunch not long after her breakfast, and it was about three hours later when they got back to the house. In that time, following by her side, Subaru had been constantly talking to Emilia— but as the hour of the Trials neared, he noticed she was speaking less and less.

By now, her words have become almost exclusively reacting to Subaru's. But—

Emilia: "Umm... I'd prefer if you... don't go."

Subaru: "Aaaaahh, understood. No problem. Until Emilia-tan's settles down, I will just keep focusing on savoring the air Emilia-tan breathes out, so don't worry."

Emilia: "I reeeaaally don't like the sound of that... But, stay here."

Faced with the complexities of a young girl's heart, Subaru shrugged his shoulders and stayed like she asked. Although they were sitting right next to each other, he was still too useless to find the courage to take her hand. But still, he was honestly glad to be needed. By none other than Emilia, after all.

Even if, to her, it must have only been filling the void of losing the one whom she relied on the most.

Ever since coming to the Sanctuary— or more accurately, ever since Puck stopped responding to her calls after they returned to the mansion, Emilia's attitude toward Subaru had consistently softened.

A part of him was overjoyed to be given a place within her heart, but there was another part of Subaru that was quietly concerned about this development.

That part of him wondered what could be the dangers of Emilia losing her strongest anchor.

Emilia: "...Hmm?"

Subaru: "Nothing at all? I was just thinking Emilia-tan's eyelashes are so long and cute, I kinda wanna eat them."

Emilia: "Subaru, you keep saying you want to eat my hair, eat my eyelashes, or lick my cheeks... Are you into that sort of thing?"

Subaru: "Where I come from, that's the greatest possible expression of love, you knowww?"

Seeing Emilia relaxing slightly and sulking at his comments, Subaru scratched his cheek.

Although Subaru would consider making licking-noises to be the utmost confession of love, actually doing so would have been extremely creepy. This was especially true in a world that didn't understand these sorts of things. So he should pay attention to what he says. Although it was too late now.

Occasionally, Subaru would try to take Emilia's mind off things by talking about random stuff like this. He now knew some fragments of Emilia's past. And if he mentions this to her, perhaps something dramatically different from last time might happen,

—But no matter how he thought about it, he felt it wouldn't be a change for the better.

No matter what the situation becomes, in the end, what he needed was time.

He needed time to help Emilia come to terms with her past and find the resolve within her own heart. And he also needed time to talk to her about the fragments of her past, and to ask about the truth behind those events. Time, time, time. There wasn't nearly enough time.

Subaru: "Just why do I have to always rush from one thing to another all the time. Ever since coming to this world, was there even a time when I got to properly relax a bit?"

Searching through his memories, if there was a time he managed to spend relatively quietly, it would've been the few weeks after he settled the problem with the Wolgarms in the forest.

Before and after that, it was just continuous turmoil without a moment's rest. It was a miracle that he didn't die of overwork. And, as he was juggling these absurd thoughts,

Emilia: "—Subaru."

He was a little slow to react to her abrupt call. Turning toward the direction of the voice— Subaru saw Emilia's wet, violet eyes very close to him, staring at him.

He was so enchanted in that moment by those tear-drenched eyes that his heart thumped so loudly he was afraid it was going to stop. Subaru gasped. And, seeing him do this, a wavering resolve and hesitation appeared within Emilia's eyes. Perhaps she was trying to decide whether to tell Subaru something before the Trial.

Subaru: "What is it?"

Subaru tried to say this as gently as he could, being careful not to rush her. If she could make up her mind here, then he mustn't disturb her.

However, hearing Subaru's reply, Emilia only turned down her gaze,

Emilia: "Ah... Mn, sorry. It's nothing. I just, wanted to call you."

Subaru: "—oh, is that right. J—J—Just wanted to call me!? Why do I get the feeling that's something couples say when they're already in a relationship!"

Emilia: "I... guess I have to go soon..."

Her resolve was gone. Subaru regretted having missed the opportunity, but he pretended not to notice and puffed up his chest nonetheless. Emilia stood up while listening to his voice, and looked outside the window at the sun that was beginning to set.

Emilia: “—I have to head to the Tomb. Subaru will only accompany me halfway, right?”

Subaru: “Even if I beg Garfiel to let me see you off to the entrance, I don’t think I can persuade him... Emilia, although I know there’s no point in me saying this, but...”

Emilia: “—It’s alright. You don’t need to say it, Subaru.”

“...Don’t push yourself too hard”— Emilia already knew what he was going to say, and stopped him before he could say it.

In front of Subaru’s quivering lips, a courageous smile emerged on Emilia’s cheeks, and she held up a finger in front of her lips,

Emilia: “I’m fine, although everyone might not think so after how flustered I was yesterday, I’ll do my best. I want to do my best. And I have to do my best, I think.”

Suddenly clenching the hand in front of her face into a fist, “That’s why”, she continued,

Emilia: “If you want to say something to me, don’t say «It’s alright to give up». You should say «Do your best», and cheer me on instead. As long as I know there’s one person who still believes in me, I’m sure I can find the strength to do it.”

Subaru: “Believe in you... Of course I believe in you, Emilia-tan. The only guy in existence who might possibly expect as much from you as I do is probably that daddy-cat, you know— So, do your best.”

Emilia: “Mn, I’ll do my best.”

For the first time today, Emilia smiled without the hint of putting up a facade. Relieved to see her smile, Subaru stood up as well and followed her out of the building.

In the Sanctuary after nightfall, a chilling wind was blowing.

Caressed by the wind, Emilia's silver hair danced and glittered as she made her way forward. Like a silver river flowing under the moonlight, Subaru watched from behind as she forged on with her stalwart steps, —Although he knew that she will fail tonight.

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The objective of bringing the refugees back to Roswaal's estate was achieved two days earlier than last time.

Aside from the date, there was not much difference compared to the previous loop. The refugees boarded the dragon carriages in an orderly manner, and the hired travelling-merchants were released from the Sanctuary along with them. Subaru and Otto accompanied them as well. If there was any difference, it would be,

Subaru: "I did ask for a guide, but I'm pretty surprised it's Ryuzu-san. Normally, this kind of thing could just be done by an underling... Or something like that, right?"

Ryuzu: "What, you don't like that it's me? After we've already drank tea and talked together, Su-bo is still so cold towards me, my heart is devastated."

Saying this, the loli-granny looked like she was actually going to cry. Squeezing her tiny body onto the tightly packed driver's bench, she self-righteously claimed a spot in the middle, right next to Subaru. The driver's bench was originally meant for two people, and with the little girl Ryuzu added to it, the situation became considerably more difficult.

Otto: "Mnmn, I feel the same way. Natsuki-san sure doesn't know how to be modest or considerate of others at all, he probably left all his subtleties back in his mother's womb, you know."

Ryuzu: "Hey, Su-bo. Who's that unfamiliar looking fella on the driver's bench?"

Otto: "Is that how low my standing is in your mind!?"

Just when Otto thought he had found another fellow victim of Subaru's, he was immediately thrown under the bus. Despite holding the reins that were literally the lifelines of everyone on the carriage, he was still completely overlooked.

A shadow descended on his unexpectedly neat-looking features, and,

Otto: "Aaahhh... I get the feeling that ever since coming here I didn't manage to leave a single impression except as the guy who keeps shouting all the time. Did I really not make any impression on Margrave Mathers?"

Subaru: "You managed to show him your usual relaxed self, and he laughed so hard he burst the wounds on his belly... That was a pretty deep impression, I'd say?"

Otto: "There are good impressions and bad impressions in this world, and which kind would you call an impression about bursting someone's belly?"

Subaru: "And this is what he says after bursting someone's belly... Hopeless, this guy."

Otto: "If I'm hopeless then you're 120% hopeless!"

Otto's reason for coming to the Sanctuary, his introduction to Roswaal, was completed without much delay. Everything proceeded the same way as last time, and in fact, bursting out laughing when he saw Otto's demeanor, Roswaal's evaluation of him couldn't have been low.

Although it didn't seem like Roswaal particularly regarded Otto as a merchant.

Subaru: "Well, long as you've got me looking out for you, you'll be sticking around for a long time. Either way, you've already seen the top-secret documents of the Mathers domain so there's no way you can run away."

Otto: "You know, meeting you was the end of my luck, Natsuki-san... But, I've already resigned myself to my fate in a way, so nevermind."

As expected, still not disheartened after encountering misfortune on the road, Otto indeed had the fundamental qualities of a travelling merchant at heart. Even if he wasn't destined for greatness at the end of the road he had taken, he wouldn't regret the choice he had made.

Deep down, Subaru did feel a sense of friendship for the guy who stayed with him for a reason like this.

Subaru: "I'll be looking forward to working you like a horse from now on! Otto!"

Otto: "What's he saying with that refreshing expression, this guy!"

Otto wailed as Subaru patted him on the shoulder and shot him a thumbs-up.

Seeing Ryuzu, squished between them, plugging her ears, Subaru looked down from the dragon carriage ready for departure, and,

Subaru: "—Then, we're off, Emilia-tan."

Emilia: "Mn, be careful."

Lifting her hand in front of her chest with a little wave, Emilia replied while timidly seeing them off.

—Last night, Subaru accompanied her to challenge the Trials. The result, as he already knew, was that she failed. Since Subaru was not allowed to follow her into the Tomb, the Trial was not interrupted halfway through, and in the end, as if in a daze, Emilia had to crawl herself out of the Tomb, her eyes trembling, before collapsing into Subaru's arms and losing consciousness.

Staying by her side the whole night as she slept, Subaru could not remember how many times he had to wipe away her tears from her sleeping face.

To see her worn down like this, it would be a lie to say that he wasn't worried to leave her here. He wanted to stay beside her for as long as he could, and hold up her trembling body, but,

Subaru: "I'll be back in a day or two, so don't push yourself. Now that the villagers are gone, there's no need to rush. Slowly and surely, we can take our time and conquer the Trials."

Emilia: "That's... right. Mn, if you say so, Subaru..."

Without any of the returning strength he had seen in her smile the night before, her smile now was weak, and felt like no more than a fleeting facade. In fact, she was already forcing herself just by standing here, seeing them off. Or perhaps, she was distracting herself so she could forget the things that were weighing on her heart.

Subaru: “Ram, I don’t mean to remind you, but...”

Ram: “Ram is finding it doubtful what that could be other than a reminder... But don’t worry. As much as I hate to say this, I share Barusu’s opinion. This should be seen as a long-term matter. Unless there are orders from Roswaal-sama, I’ll keep Garf in check.”

Subaru: “I’m in your debt... Although that sounds super-scary. I’ll repay you some other way.”

Ram: “Tch. Barusu is unexpectedly perceptive for a change.”

Subaru: “Just now, I think I’ve inadvertently avoided another *shiboufukusen*⁹³ there—!”

Clicking her tongue, Ram politely bowed without fail as she saw them off. She took a step back, and Subaru sat up straight on the driver’s bench, ready to depart— When he saw, at the back of the group of people sending them off, a golden-haired youth crossing his arms, staring at him.

The same time Subaru noticed Garfiel, Garfiel noticed him as well as their gazes met.

Over their crossing gazes, neither could tell what emotions the other must be feeling, and after what happened to Emilia last night, there was even less ground for reconciliation between them.

Subaru: “Ugh. I gotta find some clues to get through to him somehow...”

Otto: “Natsuki-san? It’s about time to head out, shall we go?”

Subaru: “Yeah, let’s go. Ryuzu-san, we’re counting on you.”

Ryuzu: “Leave it to me.”

Ryuzu nodded with a spirited reply, and Otto, holding the reins, gave the signal to Patrasche and Frufoo. The dragon carriages started to move, and the great migration of the refugees was underway.

Far from reaching full speed, the dragon carriages proceeded at a crawling pace. This was inevitable, considering the passengers were primarily women, children and the elderly.

⁹³ English flip. Means “death foreshadowing” (死亡伏線), originally “死亡フラグ” (death flag). The “death” portion was originally in Japanese, but it sounds cooler like this.

Subaru: “Even so, it seems everyone’s faces have lighted up because they know they’re going home.”

Ryuzu: “Home, it does hold that kind of power. No matter how unremarkable, how banal it is, in the end, there is where people’s hearts will remain.”

Ryuzu followed on Subaru’s whisper as he watched the long procession behind him. Hearing her remarks, Subaru crossed his arms and tilted his head “Is that right?”,

Subaru: “Ryuzu-san, do you also feel attached to the Sanctuary, after all?”

Ryuzu: “...Well, who knows. In my case, I’m in a special situation where I know nothing except that place. And just the thought of another place terrifies me, I often find.”

Subaru: “Terrifies you?”

Ryuzu: “To set foot into a completely unknown place is a terrifying thing, Su-bo. For me, this ancient self who had passed her years in vain, this is especially so.”

With an aged smile emerging on her face, Ryuzu turned her eyes to the distance. But, since she looked like a little girl, no matter how serious she tried to be, he found it extremely difficult to see her as anything except a little girl stretching up her back, pretending she’s older.

And, intermittently exchanging this casual conversation, the procession of dragon carriages continued its way through the forest. It would be about an eight-hour one-way journey to get there. The Divine Protection of Wind Evasion ensured that the journey would feel like sitting on a royal-class seat, but that also made time appear to pass slower.

Ryuzu: “Such a clever ground dragon. She’s barely made any mistakes even without me guiding the way.”

Subaru: “Yeah, she’s my cute little pride and joy, you know. It might be strange for me to be the one saying this, but all the characters around me are quite the *kyougou*⁹⁴, aren’t they?”

⁹⁴ English flip. Means “powerhouses” (強豪), originally “レベル高えぜ” (high-level).

Beginning with the members of Roswaal's mansion, and then with the start of the Royal Selection, all the people he encountered were at the top of their respective fields. It was miserable how much his mediocrity stood out while mingling with them, although now, he was looking on the bright side.

Already behind by a lap at the starting point, he had nonetheless started running. To catch up to them, the only thing he had to do was to keep running—and he had already been given the strength to do so.

Subaru: "Now that I think about it, while I'm grateful and all that you've come all this way to guide us, how will Ryuzu-san get back? If all the dragon carriages are heading to Arlam Village, you won't have any transportation, right?"

Ryuzu: "No need to worry, I'll just walk back on my own two legs like a normal person. Just so you know, these legs of mine aren't about to lose to the youngsters, you know?"

Pat pat, Ryuzu gave her short tiny legs swept along by the motion of the carriage a pat. In other words, it was completely unpersuasive, but Subaru didn't have the heart to shatter the little girl's confidence,

Subaru: "I got it I got it... Oy, Otto. Think you got the strength of will to carry a loli back to the Sanctuary?"

Otto: "Since I don't know what the intention behind that question is, do you mind if I refuse to answer that?"

Subaru: "You hear that, Ryuzu-san? Looks like we can't even count on this guy to carry a little girl back home through a dark and scary forest. A little girl or two, he couldn't care less."

Ryuzu: "That's terrible, how desolate people's hearts have become."

Otto: "You two have totally teamed up against me, haven't you!?"

As usual, Otto's wail shattered through the silence of the forest. Ryuzu and Subaru looked at each other and smiled, then she turned up her face, and,

Ryuzu: "Almost there."

Hearing Ryuzu's whisper, Subaru furrowed his brows. But that very same moment, Ryuzu's body abruptly leaned towards him. Softly catching her tiny body, "Huh?" Subaru slightly raised his voice,

Subaru: "Otto, stop. Ryuzu-san's looking a little strange."

Otto: "Should we, go back to the village?"

At Subaru's short call, Otto pulled on the reins and brought the dragon carriage to a stop. Giving the same instruction to the rest of the line behind them, one-by-one, he heard the ground dragons' cries as they halted. Then, in his arms, Ryuzu raised her little hand,

Ryuzu: "...Sorry, there's no need to go back. It's only the effect of coming so close to the barrier. If I advance any further into the forest, I can't guarantee that I will stay conscious."

Subaru: "The barrier... the same thing happened to Emilia when she entered the Sanctuary."

In Subaru's time, it was already a week ago when he first arrived at the Sanctuary.

Like in the shaking dragon carriage just now, Emilia lost consciousness, and then they were greeted by Garfiel's rude welcoming. Ryuzu's expression looked just like Emilia's back then, and if the dragon carriage continued any further, her consciousness might be ripped out just like Emilia's was.

Subaru: "Say, this barrier really knows how to tell us apart. Whether it's the sensitive-skinned me, or the insensitive-skinned Otto, neither of us can feel a thing."

Otto: "Insensitive-skinned, what's that supposed to mean? My skin doesn't feel particularly sensitive or insensitive here."

Subaru: "That's what happens when young people don't take care of their skin, once you gradually start getting spots and freckles in your late twenties, you'll regret your ignorance earlier on in life."

Otto: "I seriously have no idea what you're saying anymore, but, getting back on topic, this is where we say goodbye to Ryuzu-san... isn't it?"

Disregarding Subaru's random commentary, Otto turned to Ryuzu. And, on the receiving end, Ryuzu nodded with a pained expression on her face,

Ryuzu: "Well, yes. This is as far as I go. People from Sanctuary have terrible compatibility with the barrier. It has been a long time since I came this far... But no, it came to naught."

Subaru: “Unless, was testing the barrier part of why you came along?”

Ryuzu: “It seems I was too optimistic with that thought. The result is as you see... It’s not possible, after all. The Sanctuary can only be liberated by completing the Trials. That much is clear, Su-bo.”

Under the little girl’s gaze, Subaru realized that she had come all this way to personally confirm that they were truly imprisoned within the Sanctuary. And he could see how much she wanted to be outside the Sanctuary, and that it was all too natural that she would want this.

Subaru: “Emilia would probably feel the same thing if she came this far.”

Ryuzu: “Since she has already come inside, it would be so. Not all residents of the Sanctuary were born and raised here. Ros-bo would occasionally come to bring in those with similar circumstances from the outside. Those children too, become properties of the Witch from the moment they enter the Sanctuary. Emilia-sama is no exception.”

Subaru: “...There it is again, kinda feels like I’ve just heard some information I can’t let slide...”

Roswaal brought new residents into the Sanctuary from the outside— If they were people who are affected by the barrier, it would mean they were half-bloods as well.

Subaru: “Then he’s bringing them in and shutting them in here? Oyoy, the hell’s he thinking?”

Ryuzu: “As for his true intentions... I cannot rightly say. When you get back, you should ask Ros-bo this yourself, Su-bo.”

Ryuzu powerlessly shook her head, and pulled herself out of the frowning Subaru’s arms. As she lightly jumped her tiny body down from the coachman’s stand, Patrasche extended her head over to her, and Ryuzu patted her on the neck,

Ryuzu: “Good ground dragon. Become your master’s strength, now.”

Patrasche nudged her nose on Ryuzu in reply, acknowledging her words. In fact, without coming off as boasting, this was the first time Subaru had seen Patrasche being so intimate with anyone except him. Even Otto had eaten quite a few head-butts while trying to have conversations with her.

Subaru: “There are all sorts of things I still need to do in the Sanctuary, so once I’ve asked all I want to ask from Frederica, I’ll come right back.”

Ryuzu: “That would be best... This is only my intuition, but without you here, I don’t think anything will be moving forward inside the Sanctuary.”

Subaru: “That’s another huge over-evaluation to dump on me... even if it’s just intuition.”

Ryuzu: “It’s the intuition of a woman who has lived over a hundred years, you know?”

Subaru: “The way to see that depends on whether we look at its good side or not, I guess.”

Replying to Ryuzu this way, Subaru politely bowed from atop the coachman’s stand. Watching her back away from the carriage, Otto quietly spilled “We’re going”,

Subaru: “Yeah, see you again, Ryuzu-san. Take care on your way back.”

Ryuzu: “Mmm. You’ll get out of the forest if you go straight ahead from here. Keep going until you hit the road, and then the ground dragons can take it from there. Take care.”

Waving her little hand, Ryuzu bid them farewell. Otto waved the signal flag and the line of dragon carriages resumed its march.

After watching them leave, Ryuzu turned her back and headed into the depths of the forest. Watching her little figure disappear into the gaps between the trees, praying that she would get back safely— Subaru felt a lump inside his chest that he couldn’t put into words.

Subaru: “...Something just, feels off.”

He had felt a sense of incongruity in their previous conversation. But, unable to quite put his finger on what it was, Subaru relinquished his weight onto the rocking of the dragon carriage.

Coming out of the forest, into the radiant light of the sun, the road broadened out before them— They had crossed the barrier, and left the Sanctuary. From here, there was still a long, long road ahead. There were things he must do, and things he must say.

With these weighing down like mountains, Subaru continued on in the swaying dragon carriage.

Arc 4 Chapter 31 - Maid, Maid, Maid

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 11, Chapter 1 “Maid, Maid, Maid”, Part 6

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#)

—For Subaru, this would be the second time returning to Roswaal’s mansion from the Sanctuary.

Subaru: “Although it was just a painful experience the first time...”

Subaru scratched his cheek mumbling this and jumped down from Patrasche’s back outside the gate.

After bidding farewell to Ryuzu, Subaru and the refugees returned to Arlam Village safe and sound. Although, since they had already done so in the last loop, and having his trusted Patrasche to guide the way, there was nothing he had to worry about.

Subaru: “The villagers are rejoicing, and Otto’s staying behind in the village like last time. I was originally hoping to bring Otto along as a meat shield though...”

Actually, Subaru hesitated about dragging Otto along to the mansion. After all, there was a good chance it could get genuinely dangerous, and bringing Otto, who doesn’t last well in intense situations, along probably wasn’t a good idea.

In terms of a straight-up brawl, Subaru couldn’t win against Otto, but Otto wasn’t exactly a god-like martial artist. Subaru wasn’t particularly looking forward to seeing his organs in front of the Bowel Hunter.

Subaru: “I hope nothing happened...”

Last time, Subaru returned to the mansion six days after the beginning of the Trials. This time, it was three— Compared to before, he still had three days of leeway.

Presumably, the mansion was attacked on the same night Subaru was killed. Taking all the factors into consideration, that much should be certain. The problem was,

Subaru: “Three days left... In other words, I’d have to get the information out of Frederica and head back to the Sanctuary, fix the problems in the Sanctuary, and then force march back to the mansion with Garfiel. Just looking at time alone, it’s not impossible, but...”

There were tremendous hurdles to overcome before he could turn these empty theories to reality.

It takes eight hours just to clear the one-way route from the Sanctuary to the mansion. Going back and forth once would already take up almost a day in travel time. Counting the loss of time in between as well, the amount of usable time available to Subaru becomes even more severe.

Subaru: “There are backup plans for solving the problem as well... If I choose the optimal plan, it will be an arduous route even in the most optimistic cases...”

Knowing ahead of time when Elsa will attack, the optimal solution for Subaru would be to repel the assassin. This way, they wouldn’t need to be constantly looking over their shoulders and be frightened by every shadow. In other words, he was hoping for complete victory, if possible.

To accomplish this, they must exceed Elsa in combat strength, which would require having either Roswaal or Garfiel. But, at the moment, the likelihood of bringing either of them back to the mansion was not looking high.

Subaru: “So in the end, there’s no choice but to go for the second-best option... Huh.”

While Subaru was muttering this despondently and scratching at his head, Patrasche brought her nose over. Smiling awkwardly at the face of the ground dragon that was nudging against his shoulder, Subaru rubbed his palm over her hard, scaly skin, and patted her on the head,

Subaru: “The rewards match the risks, but we aren’t ready to bring nearly enough winning chances to counterbalance the risk. Which pretty much just leaves us with the «turn tail and run and scatter like a bunch of baby spiders» battle plan.”

At the time of his battle with the Witch Cult, this was a conclusion that had crossed his mind.

But while this was possible due to the number of pieces he had last time, this time, there weren't as many hands he could play. Even with prior knowledge of the incoming attack, he would be more than satisfied if they could just manage to escape.

But, there were problems with that as well.

Subaru: "Everyone in the mansion. Rem, Petra, Frederica... and Beako, I don't know if they'll all cooperate with evacuation. Honestly, if I just piggyback Rem and hold Petra's hand I'll be able to bring them along, but I'll probably break a few bones before I could convince the other two."

Of course, if it ever comes down to it, he would drag everyone into the dragon carriage by force and abduct them away if he had to. He didn't think he'd be able to beat them in a fight, but if he kept yanking on their arms and wouldn't let go, he might just manage it somehow. No, he definitely will.

Subaru: "—Huu."

Exhaling a small sigh, Subaru felt the weight of the responsibility on his shoulders.

How many people's fates were resting on his words, his actions, and his resolve. On the night before the battle with the White Whale, he had felt this way as well.

Subaru: "It won't do any good to procrastinate outside the gates forever. I still don't know if anything happened inside. Better make sure everyone's fine first..."

???: "And after that?"

Subaru: "After that, I'll think about how to persuade them. Oh yeah, I got it, since they won't know anyway, I'll just lie and tell them that it's Roswaal's instructions or something..."

???: "Woaa. You're so baaad, Subaru."

Subaru: "Just call me *kitanai to hankoutekina*⁹⁵, I'm still at an age to aspire towards this kind of bad-boy image, you know... Wh—"

⁹⁵ Engrish flip. Means "underhanded and rebellious" (汚いと反抗的な), originally "ダーティワイルド" (dirty wild).

In the middle of his sentence, Subaru heard the sound of giggling coming from behind and turned around. And, in the mansion's front gardens on the other side of the gate, there was a little maid—the familiar little girl, Petra, standing there.

In front of the surprised-looking Subaru raising his brows, she shook her chestnut-colored hair and adorably tilted her head,

Petra: “Welcome back, Subaru-sama. Your return has come earlier than I thought.”

Subaru: “Yeah, I’m back... Looks like I just caught a glimpse of the results of Frederica’s education for the gifted. Thanks for the reception.”

At the sight of Petra picking up the hems of her skirt in a curtsy, Subaru loosened his cheeks in relief, before softly pushing open the gate and stepping inside. As he went on leading Patrasche toward the ground dragon stables, Subaru looked down at Petra walking alongside him.

Petra: “—?”

Seeing Subaru looking at her, she made a strange expression and hurriedly turned her back and began cleaning up her hair and smoothing out her dress. After she seemed satisfied with all that, she turned back to Subaru with a nod,

Petra: “Okay, what is it, Subaru-sama?”

And, with a smile even more radiant than before, she showed him her adorable smile.

Merging the cuteness of a little girl, and a promise of future beauty, it was a smile that, in spite of its youth, carried a fiendish power to abduct the hearts of the opposite sex.

It was a perfect smile calculated with a complete understanding of how it would be perceived by others. Presented with such a smile, Subaru had to suck in a bit of air,

Subaru: “Aaaahhh, that! Isn’t that just way too adorable, youuu!”

Petra: “Wa—waaah!?”

Completely oblivious to her underlying intentions, Subaru wrapped the little girl in a hug as if that was the reaction she requested and started affectionately rubbing her head with a variety of complex petting techniques without any regard for restraint. Petra squeaked out a confused cry at the sudden action, but,

Subaru: “You don’t even know half of what I’m feeling right now. Youuu, youuu! Aaahhh, damn I’m so happy to see you again!!”

Petra: “Wha —what, what’s going on!? Wah, wait, Subaru... It’s too early for me to...”

Subaru: “Really, I’m so glad...”

Petra: “—Subaru?”

Her face all blushing, struggling in his arms, Petra’s expression changed. She settled in his arms, and looked up at Subaru who had lowered his voice, and, gradually, the at-once embarrassed and delighted expression disappeared from her face.

Petra: “Are you, hurting somewhere...?”

Worried, she extended out a finger and touched his trembling cheeks. Then, a palm pressed against her fingers, and with “I’m alright”, Subaru shook his head. He inhaled a deep breath through his nostrils, and paused for a second. And then, opening his eyes once more,

Subaru: “I’m just seriously, from the bottom of my heart, relieved. —I’m home, Petra.”

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—After returning Patrasche to the stables, Subaru returned to the mansion holding Petra’s hand since she wanted to hold hands with him. Fortunately, according to Petra, no noteworthy changes had taken place since Subaru left the mansion.

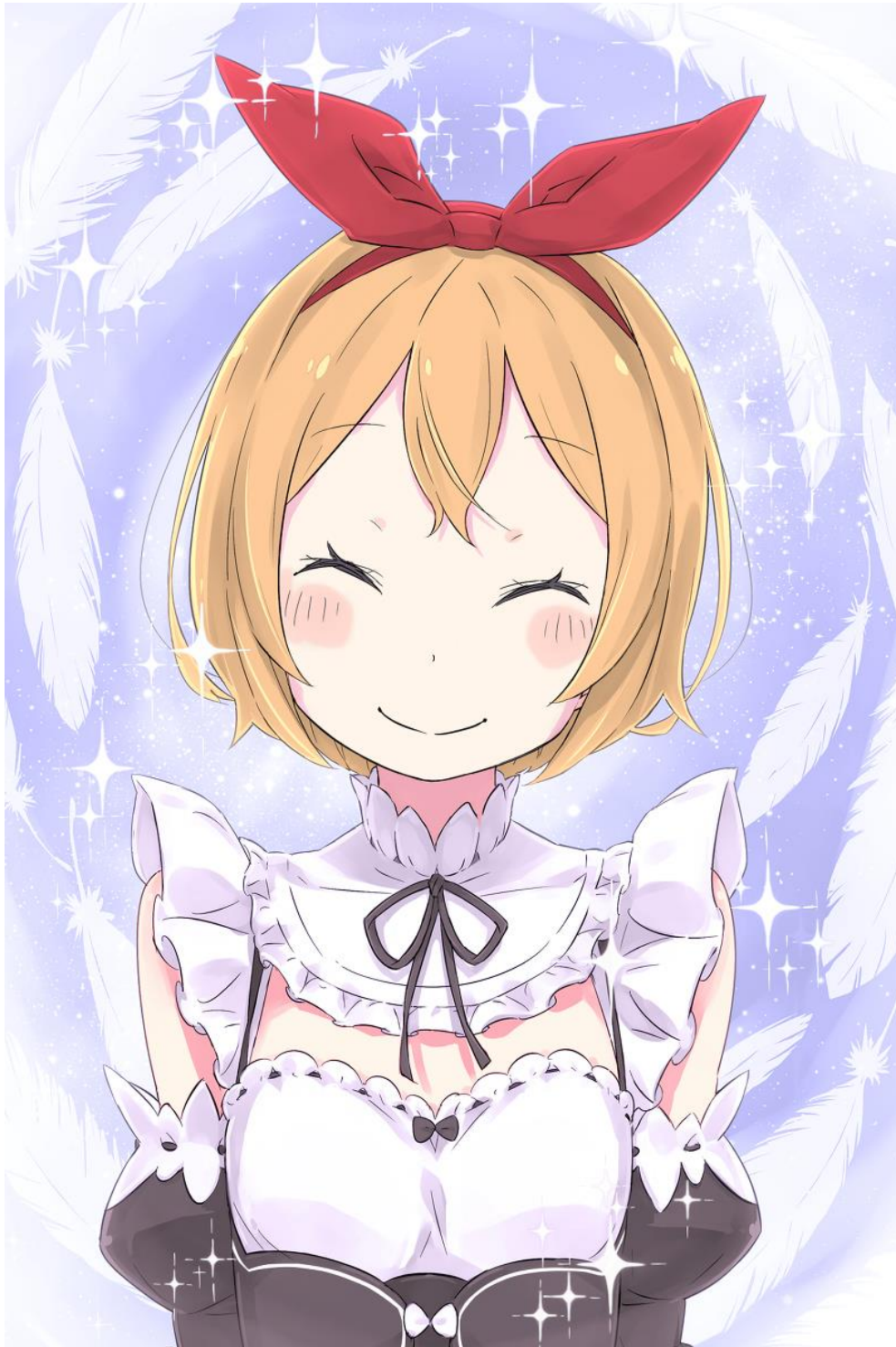


Illustration from Volume 11, coloring by u/CM_2 ([source](#))

Petra: “Right now, Frederica-neesama⁹⁶ is away inspecting the barriers in the mountains, so she’ll be back after a little while... Maybe.”

As Petra informed him of the head maid’s absence, Subaru recalled the barriers in the mountains—that is, the magical crystals that sealed out the Wolgarms. Though the Wolgarms in the mountains were supposed to have been eradicated, the barriers remained in service even now.

It seems, aside from the Wolgarms, there were other dangerous Witchbeasts that needed to be kept out by the barriers, and, as the managers of Arlam Village, the task of maintaining them fell to the subjects of the Roswaal camp.

Petra: “Once everyone in the village comes back, they can check for breaks in the barriers themselves, but since everyone hasn’t come back yet, Frederica-neesama is doing it.”

Subaru: “Now that you’re calling her *neesama*, it sounds like you two have gotten closer while I was away, kinda makes me feel all warm and fuzzy inside. Also, the villagers are all back now, you know.”

Petra: “Really?”

When he pointed in the direction of the village, Petra’s eyes lighted up and she squeaked out an excited cry.

Her family was among those who evacuated to the Capital, so both her parents had already been safely returned to the village. But even so, she was still separated from neighbors and friends. Now that she knew they were safe, Petra happily clapped her hands.

Subaru: “Yeah, you should go see them later. I’m sure they’ll be excited to see you in your maid’s uniform.”

Petra: “Yeah. Once I get permission from Frederica-neesama, I’ll go change!”

Subaru: “No, there’s no need to change... You look cute in it, you should let everyone see...”

Petra: “Ehehee, cute? I’m cute?”

⁹⁶ Petra addresses Frederica with an “older sister” honorific (姉様).



Subaru: “Yeah you’re cute, you’re cute. So everyone sh...”

Petra: “Yeah! I’ll change and go see them!”

It pretty much turned into a situation where no matter how many times he tried saying “No it’s fine”, his voice kept getting canceled out by her peals of thunder. Seeing that she was definitely not planning to change her mind about this, Subaru gave up making any further proposals.

Cracking the bones of his neck, Subaru exhaled a deep breath and stopped.

They were on the mansion’s second floor— Rubbing his soles on the carpet, he had lifted up his face and was staring at a door. Petra, feeling a little lonely, let go of his fingers. She was a smart girl who could read the mood.

Subaru: “I’m sorry, Petra. Let me be alone with her, for a little while.”

Petra: “Mn, I understand. I’ll go finish cleaning up the west wing, please call me if you need anything.”

As though she knew even before Subaru spoke, Petra put away her young girl’s demeanors and returned to the role of a maid, and, with a slight bow, she left him there.

Receiving this gesture of consideration from her, despite there being a mountain of pressing matters closing in on him, Subaru lightly poked himself in the head. Poking, and—

Subaru: “I asked myself what I should give priority to... and I wound up coming here.”

Pushing open the door, Subaru slowly stepped into the room.

A room where time had stopped. In that plain and simple room, there was a bed— and on it, a young girl was sleeping. The girl was no longer wearing her familiar servant’s dress, but was now wrapped in a light blue nightgown.

Her eyes were closed, and not even her faint breathing could be heard. Only, the silent rise and fall of her chest gave proof that she still lives.

Subaru: “...Rem.”

Lending voice to that name, who could understand the vortex of emotions carried within that single word. That unstoppable torrent of emotion meant for only one person in the world.

He had resolved to be strong, to turn his heart to steel, to not waver in the face of all difficulties. Resolved to no longer depend on others, and to hold his head high.

—But, in front of her, all this determination scattered into mist.

The Subaru who told Emilia to leave it to him, who took her hand and told her he will find a way, the Subaru who once did so with so much strength. The facade of that resolve fell apart the moment he stood before her.

Subaru: “I’m pathetic... I’m so... weak.”

As soon as he was in front of Rem, Subaru returned to the weak Natsuki Subaru he once was.

Returned to the time before Rem’s devotion had affirmed him, to the time before he first stood up.

Slowly, he reached out to her sleeping face and gently swept aside the hair on her forehead. Asleep, her expression did not change, and he had not found a single clue to restoring her eaten self. But if he did nothing and let her go on sleeping like this, it would be certain that even her vessel will be lost as well.

Subaru: “Maybe you didn’t mean to, but because of you, my resolve has been hardened.”

Weak and fragile, the surface of his heart that would break off at the touch was slowly covered over with steel.

The fact that Rem’s sleeping figure and the certain beating of her heart still existed allowed Natsuki Subaru to return to that instant. To the emotions of that moment when he was reborn.

Subaru: “Because you told me that it’s alright even if I am weak, you told me that you will help me become stronger... I will find a way, no matter what it takes, and stand up no matter how many times I fall.”

No matter what pain, what suffering, what hardship or unpleasantness awaited him, the love of her entire soul healed Subaru, and sent the desire into his heart to move forward in return.

Subaru: “You, and Petra and everyone else... I will bring you all out safely.”

He gently stroked her sleeping forehead, and suppressed his feeling that wanted to touch her more. A gust of wind had blown into the room, while he sat silently in the chair at her bedside.

That portion of the limited time he had, the meager, precious time that he needed to conserve, he gave it all to her. At this point, this was the best that Subaru could do to offer her his heart.

Time passed in this stillness for an unknown amount of time.

Suddenly, Subaru’s consciousness that was vacantly staring at Rem in a daze was pulled back to reality by the sound of a knock on the door. Lifting his face, and turning to the door, “Yes”, he answered, and,

???: “Apologies for the intrusion. —I am glad you’ve returned safely, Subaru-sama.”

Quietly pushing open the door, a tall woman entered the room. With her golden hair swaying, and her posture impeccable and refined— It was Frederica.

Seeing Subaru at the sleeping Rem’s side, she slightly lowered her head, and,

Frederica: “There are a variety of questions I wish to ask you... and I am sure Subaru-sama feels the same. Let us change the location. Although she is asleep, I doubt these are things that she would especially like to hear.”

Subaru: “That sure helped speed things along... The things I want to ask you, do you already have some idea what they are?”

Frederica: “Possibly.”

Hearing that modest response, Subaru spilled out a small sigh and stood up from his chair. He touched Rem’s sleeping cheeks one last time, and, as if to sever his reluctance, he clenched tight his fist,

Subaru: “Your rowdy, foul-mouthed little brother, that *gap moe*⁹⁷ who looks like a loli but is a granny on the inside. The Sanctuary, that is also the Experimental Grounds, and Roswaal’s true intentions. Let me look forward to seeing how much of that you can answer.”

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Frederica: “Since the Master hasn’t returned, it would seem that the Trials haven’t ended yet?”

After leaving Rem’s bedroom, the two of them moved to the drawing room.

Placing a steaming cup of amber-colored tea in front of Subaru, Frederica sat down across from him and opened with these words. Receiving the cup, Subaru nodded “Yeah”, as he stirred his tea with a spoon,

Subaru: “You sure got straight to the point— So, don’t you feel a little guilty about knowing all that inside information and yet giving us so little when you sent us off?”

Frederica: “I won’t make excuses. After all, it is true that I did not tell you everything about the Sanctuary and the Trials and that no-good little brother of mine.”

Frederica’s detached tone did not seem to be carrying any sense of guilt about that fact. However, he couldn’t say for certain that she was entirely without remorse. Perhaps, she was merely suppressing such feelings and pretending to be without emotions so as not to reveal the contents of her heart.

The same type of person as Ram— but considering the length of Frederica and Subaru’s relationship, it was far more difficult to tell with Frederica.

Subaru: “As I said back in the room, there’re all sorts of things I want to ask you... Can I expect to get answers to all of them?”

Frederica: “...I don’t imagine I would be able to meet such expectations. Since the Sanctuary is not yet liberated, I am still bound by my Contract to the Master. As long as I must abide by that Contract, there is a limit to what facts I can convey to Subaru-sama.”

⁹⁷ A contradiction in exhibited characteristics that people find cutely attractive.

Subaru: “Contracts again... It’s the same with everybody here.”

Subaru pressed a hand to his forehead and felt an especially bitter sense of disappointment.

As much as he wanted to raise his voice and scream that Contracts could be interpreted more freely, when he remembered his promise to Emilia, he realized he couldn’t bring himself to force anyone else to break theirs.

Subaru: “What if I were to ask you about the details of your Contract?”

Frederica: “I’m sorry. As long as the Contract exists between Roswaal-sama and myself, the information I can reveal is limited— I’m afraid that is all I could say on that subject.”

Subaru: “There’s no new information at all. Damn it, why must that asshole always do these baffling things. Looks like this time I’ll have no choice but to treat him as an enemy from now on.”

Clicking his tongue at the culprit responsible for this disappointing reality, Subaru tried to pull himself together by taking a sip of his tea. He could still only taste leaves, but after drinking them over and over, Subaru could already distinguish the expensive leaves from those that are not— And his tongue told him that these were expensive leaves.

Subaru: “This may not be the right occasion, but... Frederica, you originally came from the Sanctuary, and you’re Garfiel’s older sister, right? Or you can’t even tell me that much?”

Frederica: “No, that is not a problem. What you said is... correct. Although, more accurately, I am not from the Sanctuary, but only grew up there. However, since I have lived in the Sanctuary from as early as I could remember, it would not be incorrect to put it that way.”

Subaru: “Not from the Sanctuary... That’s what Ryuzu-san said as well. Sounds like Roswaal likes to bring half-bloods to live there, huh?”

In the dragon carriage on the road home, Ryuzu, who tagged along, had mentioned this. Back then, because of Ryuzu’s refusal, he didn’t manage to get to the true intentions behind Roswaal’s actions, but,

Subaru: “half-bloods can’t pass through the barrier, so bringing them in is basically the same as imprisoning them there, isn’t it? Then why would he do such a thing... And the people there, despite knowing that they’re being imprisoned, they...”

They didn’t seem to be particularly upset and instead appeared to be living peaceful lives there. At least, they didn’t seem to be people who had been forcefully dragged in and trapped, nor were there any signs of outrage at their treatment in the course of their daily lives.

In other words, it was as though they had accepted their lives within the Sanctuary. —Could there be some significance to that?

Frederica: “Subaru-sama, do you know about the Demi-Human War?”

Subaru: “...Demi-Human War. If it’s just the word, I feel like I’ve heard it somewhere before.”

If he sieved through his memories to the very beginning, he must have heard that word two or three times before. Subaru remembered being struck with the impression that that name more or less conveyed the basics of what had occurred.

Hearing Subaru’s vague answer, Frederica gently brushed her fingers through her golden hair, before lightly covering her razor-sharp fangs that were peeking through the corner of her lips,

Frederica: “If you wish to unravel the purpose of the Sanctuary’s existence and Roswaal-sama’s considerations, we would first have to talk a bit about the Demi-Human War.”

Saying this, she stood up and walked to the back of the drawing room. Sensing Subaru’s gaze trailing behind her, Frederica picked up a box from the table in the back of the room, and,

Frederica: “Don’t be so alarmed, I am merely getting some confectionaries.”

Revealing a slight smile on the corners of her lips, she returned and set down the box in front of Subaru.

Laid out inside, were assorted sweets unique to this world which he had only tasted on extremely rare occasions in Roswaal’s mansion. While Subaru looked back and forth between the treats and the face of the girl who presented them,

Frederica: “Since it will be a long and tiresome story, please enjoy, and bear with me.”

Arc 4 Chapter 32 - 1/4

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 11, Chapter 1 “Maid, Maid, Maid”, Part 8

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

Tilting the steaming teacup to his lips and taking a sip, Subaru opened his ears to Frederica’s words.

Frederica: “The Demi-Human War— To begin with, would Subaru-sama know what kind of dispute this was?”

Subaru: “Like I said, I don’t know the details. Just... I can kinda imagine what might’ve happened just from the name and the historical background.”

Frederica: “My, that’s interesting. May I ask what you imagined it to be?”

Hearing this reply from Subaru, Frederica covered the corner of her lips and smiled. Covering her mouthful of fangs while smiling seemed to be a deeply ingrained habit of hers, and Subaru often saw her this way.

It would seem that although she loved to smile, she didn’t want others to see it.

Closing his eyes and scratching at his cheek, with “Right”, Subaru began,

Subaru: “I don’t know how long ago that war took place, but I can imagine it couldn’t have had nothing to do with the Witch of Envy. I’ve seen how Emilia was treated like a tumor in the Capital, and I know that half-elves are despised by all sorts of people.”

Recorded even in picture-books, the Witch of Envy was universally known as the unparalleled symbol of absolute evil. Being a silver-haired half-elf, for having only this one point in common with the Witch, Emilia was treated with this unjust prejudice. So, in the wake of the Witch of Envy— Subaru could imagine the kind of conflict that might have arisen from even the most insignificant details.

Subaru: “A half-elf, would be a child between a human and an elf, right? Carrying on from their hatred of half-elves... It’s not too far-fetched that some would believe that half-bloods born between humans and other races are also heresy deserving of persecution.”

Frederica: “...Please, do go on.”

Subaru: “I’m just pulling this from imagination, but since the persecution of half-elves led to the persecution of half-bloods by association, if we take this to the extreme, the very existence of the demi-humans who sired half-bloods would also be a threat as well... That’s probably what some of those guys are thinking.”

To the extent of Subaru’s knowledge, the humans are by far the most numerous race in this world. He knew of the existence of elves, and beast-men like Anastasia’s triplets, but just based on his observations over the days he spent at the Capital, the absolute number of demi-humans were indeed far fewer than the humans.

And so, solely owing to their majority, they came to believe that they had justice on their side.

Subaru: “I doubt absolutely everyone would’ve taken up this way of thinking, but the loud and obnoxious types are probably the same anywhere. So, compared to hatred of demi-humans... It’s probably closer to fear, isn’t it. And when that frustration eventually boils over...”

Frederica: “The tension between humans and demi-humans erupted. The smoldering kindling caught fire, and with ever-gathering momentum, its flames engulfed the whole of Lugunica.”

Spilling this in a melancholic voice, Frederica picked up from Subaru’s words.

Closing one of his eyes, Subaru gazed at her downcast expression. And Frederica, with a single nod, turned up her face.

Frederica: “There is almost no need to supplement your conjectures, nor are there any grounds for dispute... Have you truly never heard any detailed accounts of the war?”

Subaru: “Nah. If that was essentially correct, it’s just thanks to my power of imagination. Or reading experience... This kind of stuff shows up in light novels a lot, you know, antagonism between races and stuff.”

Although, of course, Subaru never actually paid much mind to these problems in reality.

Even in his original world, so-called racial discrimination existed. But, to Subaru, they might as well have been taking place a world away. Like problems existing in some parallel world.

He was himself, and the others were others, he had held this coldly apathetic outlook. And while this was true in a way, in reality, he was only averting his eyes.

Subaru: "It's just, even if I can imagine how things got the way they are, I'd still have no idea how to fix it. But since you're saying this in the past-tense, at least that means the Demi-Human War had already run its course, right?"

Frederica: "In a sense, yes. But the scars of the war run deep, and the sprouts of prejudice against the offspring between humans and demi-humans remain deeply rooted even now."

Perhaps because she herself was born as a target of such prejudice, Frederica's words carried a certain heaviness that could not have been understood by someone merely listening from the outside.

Subaru wanted to ask what happened next, but hesitated before he could throw these words at her. And, sensing this on his mind, Frederica sighed,

Frederica: "My apologies for making you worried. Let us continue the story."

Subaru: "I kinda wanna say «don't force yourself», but these things directly tie into what I need to ask so I can't really say that. So, do force yourself, please."

Frederica: "My my. You certainly are adept at spurring people on, Subaru-sama."

Favorably interpreting Subaru's rather selfish remark, Frederica lifted her own cup and let a sip roll over her tongue,

Frederica: "The Demi-Human War began approximately fifty years ago. From there, it went on for nearly ten years... and it was recorded to have concluded forty years ago."

Subaru: "Ten years... that's a long time. Although, back home, I think we've got a Hundred Years' War and a Thirty Years' War or something in our history as well."

Subaru wasn't so well read when it came to historical novels, so his knowledge of these events didn't go past glancing over their names in textbooks. But, with names like that, he could more or less guess how long those wars lasted at least.

Thirty years, and a hundred years. It's a frightening thought, how anyone could hate another person enough to carry on a war for so long. Even Subaru had only spent about two months in the parallel world.

Subaru: "That's just way too exhausting, who can keep on playing Bokosuka Wars⁹⁸ for more than ten years?"

Frederica: "Regardless, the war first originated from a dispute between the humans and a demi-human settlement. Originally, it would only have been a local dispute contained within a small area... But because of the incident that followed, in a single stroke, the heat of war flared up. And the horrific conflict, in which a tide of blood washed over every corner of the land, began."

Subaru: "The incident that followed?"

Frederica: "Not long after conflict first broke out, the King of Lugunica at the time saw the seriousness of the situation and dispatched his close attendant as an envoy for peace. On the demi-human side, the chiefs of various races gathered to welcome the envoy and to negotiate for a resolution, but..."

Hearing Frederica's words trail off, Subaru silently tilted his head, prompting her to continue. Seeing his gesture, Frederica closed her eyes,

Frederica: "Those who attended that conference—the envoys from the Palace and the demi-human chiefs alike, were all indiscriminately slaughtered on the spot."

Subaru: "Indiscriminately slaughtered...? But by who, and for what?"

Frederica: "The culprit remains unknown even to this day. But, at the time, both the humans and the demi-humans were convinced that the other was responsible. And consequently, a small ember became a great devouring fire, and would not be put out for all ten years... As it so happened."

⁹⁸ Video game from the 80s (see [here](#)).

Subaru: “What were they doing? If they just properly talked it through... But that’s too idealistic, isn’t it.”

Given the emotions of the people at the time, this might be too much of a god-like perspective to take.

The envoy dispatched by the Palace was the King’s personal attendant. Considering the prestige of the envoy murdered at the scene of negotiation, to withdraw the matter without bringing the culprit to justice would have been beneath the dignity of a Kingdom. And, from the demi-humans’ perspective, the fact was that their chiefs had been gathered in one place and massacred. Although it’d be demeaning to count lives this way, in purely numerical terms, the demi-human side lost more.

Adding to that, was the existence of the Witch of Envy that first laid the foundations of the strife between their races.

It would be difficult enough to even begin to mend their relations, and in this standstill, there was no time to deal with the problems that followed— Further and further behind, unable to stem the tide, it wouldn’t be hard to imagine how this invited the tragedy that resulted.

Frederica: “In the end— the Demi-Human War concluded with the surrender of the demi-humans. Even then, the demi-humans refused to take responsibility for the massacre at the conference, and only acknowledged that it would be senseless to continue the war any further.”

Subaru: “Personally, stuck in this kind of quagmire, I think the side that stepped back first was actually the smarter one. Also, this was like a civil war, wasn’t it? There’s no benefit to the country at all.”

Frederica: “The truth was precisely that. Lugunica’s power greatly declined over the course of the Demi-Human War. It was fortunate that at the time, all the neighboring nations were also dealing with turmoil of their own, otherwise, Lugunica may very well have been replaced by some other kingdom.”

It must have been fortune in midst of misfortune that the other three nations were also occupied with internal strife, thus narrowly saving Lugunica from a final deathblow.

Yet, a crisis no less perilous than that era was facing this Kingdom even now.

Subaru: “But, well, it’s still pretty amazing that they managed to put an end to a war that lasted so long. It must’ve taken a whole lot of courage, and the resistance from the hardliners couldn’t have been easy to overcome.”

Frederica: “...It was because humanity had one overwhelming presence among them who bent the pro-war faction’s will. For it was to the unrivaled swordsmanship of the Sword Saint of that generation, Thearesia van Astrea-sama, that all the demi-humans bowed their heads... is something the matter?”

Subaru: “No, I was just surprised to hear a name that I know... It’s a small world.”

Having heard that name before, Subaru remembered that Wilhelm’s wife was named Thearesia.

The Sword Saint of that era, she must have been the generation before Reinhard. Hearing that a single woman had put an end to a war that had raged on for ten years, Subaru felt a true sense of the unorthodoxy of the existence that was the Sword Saint.

Subaru: “Well, I have a general idea how the Demi-Human War went now. And I can more or less imagine the kind of problems might’ve sprung up from it.”

Frederica: “The reality was almost exactly as Subaru-sama surmised. It would seem that your mind is sharper than I thought. I’m surprised to find that I’ve misjudged you.”

Subaru: “I’ll just... pretend that was a compliment for now. So, moving along, although the Demi-Human War has ended, the prejudice against the demi-humans couldn’t have been dispelled so easily. Of course, people wouldn’t blatantly flaunt their hostility under the public eye, but.”

Even in the Capital, along the streets lined by fruit-stalls, humans and demi-humans seemed to be living in normal, peaceful coexistence. But who knows how much pain and struggle had to pass before such a scene could become part of normal life? And, contrary to places like these, there must also have been places where peace had not become normal occurrence, and there will always be places where light does not reach.

Subaru: “Places like closed-off villages with small populations, isolated from the outside world... If one guy stands out as a problem, I get the feeling the whole place would set on him.”

Frederica: “You could say that my little brother and I had lived through precisely this kind of environment.”

Furrowing her brows at some painful reminiscences, for the first time in this conversation, Frederica directly referred to her little brother— Garfiel. Then, turning her eyes somewhere far away,

Frederica: “My brother is my sibling by a different father. Our surnames are different because of this... I took my father’s surname, while my little brother took the surname of our mother.”

Subaru: “Your full name is Frederica... Baumann, right?”

Frederica: “Yes. And my brother’s last name would be Tinzel. Our mother was a... clumsy person, and also an unlucky person.”

It was as if Frederica tried to find the right word, but failed to find it in the end. Hearing her say this, Subaru showed an expression of non-understanding, when she started again with “It’s embarrassing to say this, but”.

Frederica: “It seems, our mother was in the process of being sold off because of her debt, when the slavers were set upon by a group of demi-human bandits and she was captured... That’s where she met my father.”

Subaru: “Wha!? Wa—wai—wait! I get the feeling I have to prepare my heart before I can hear this!”

Frederica: “But that father died soon after, and my mother carried me as an infant as she wandered without a home, when she was captured by another demi-human band. That’s where she met Garfiel’s father...”

Subaru: “Waitwaitwait, I was wrong! I never thought it was going to get this heavy!”

Frederica: “And so, I won’t dwell on these things. In any case, Garfiel was born, but once again, we were unable to stay with Garfiel’s father. So our mother, carrying the two of us, wandered once more, and, when we were at the end of our ropes, we were taken in by the House of Mathers.”

Briefly laying bare her heavy past, a certain nostalgia emerged in Frederica’s eyes as she sighed. Then, stroking the handle of her chair with a palm,

Frederica: “At the time, still in his early teens, the Master... Roswaal-sama, had already inherited his title as the head of the House of Mathers. To my brother and I, the Master is our savior in the truest sense of the word. And I consider it to be an honor to be able to serve at his side this way.”

Subaru: “So the two of you were brought into the Sanctuary, and lived there, huh... By the way, it’s a bit hard to bring this up but, what happened to your mother?”

From what he could gather from her story so far, their mother must have been a pure-blooded human. Which meant that she would have been able to enter and exit the Sanctuary at will. But whether it was at the Sanctuary or the mansion, Subaru had never seen anyone who could have been her. Yet just as Subaru was imagining the worst, Frederica shook her head,

Frederica: “It seems I’ve made you worried, but please rest assured. After leaving my brother and I with Roswaal-sama, our mother left the mansion without leaving word of where she was going. Nor have we heard from her since. But she must be safe and still living somewhere, I believe.”

Subaru: “———”

Listening to Frederica lightly saying this, Subaru couldn’t utter another word and only remained in silence. Although the worst Subaru had prepared for was their being separated by death, the crueler reality was that she had abandoned them.

But hearing this created even more questions,

Subaru: “Even though your mother left like this, Garfiel is still using her surname, while you’re using your father’s. Why is that?”

Frederica: “Because there were no records of her left behind, our memories of our mother were told to us by others... And in these unreliable circumstances, I took my father’s surname. As for the reason why my little brother took our mother’s surname... it was because that child didn’t know about our mother. As much as he pretends to be meaner than he is, he is stubbornly sentimental at heart.”

Subaru: “Stubbornly sentimental...”

Reviewing his impression of Garfiel in his mind, that description would explain many things.

Although he would be quicker to take action than to think things through, and despite being foul-mouthed and rude, Garfiel was nonetheless sensible and understanding. He considered himself dumb, but he was not entirely unthoughtful, nor would he act completely without reason. Everything about him was reminiscent of a juvenile-delinquent punk from the good old days.

In terms of sensibilities alone, Subaru couldn't deny that Garfiel was upstanding and noble-minded in his own way.

Frederica: "Subaru-sama— Would you happen to know how the Sanctuary's barrier distinguishes its targets?"

While Subaru occupied his mind with such thoughts, Frederica threw him this rather abrupt question.

Unable to understand the meaning behind it, Subaru was a little slow to react. He looked back at Frederica without much confidence, and with "Umm",

Subaru: "Honestly, no. While there's no doubt the barrier certainly exists, I can't feel it at all. It's probably using some kind of magic to check everyone that passes, I guess..."

Frederica: "The barrier does so by verifying the blood inside the veins of those who passes through. If it can clearly distinguish both human and demi-human blood, that person will be repelled. Those are the fundamentals of the nature of the barrier."

Subaru: "...What are you trying to say?"

Unsure why she was suddenly revealing the barrier's conditions to him, Subaru only quietly asked her this in return. Receiving this response, Frederica lightly nodded,

Frederica: "Do you perhaps now understand how I was able to pass through the barrier and exit the Sanctuary?"

Subaru: "...I don't. I feel like I understand even less now after you told me the barrier's conditions. On the road back, I saw Ryuzu-san almost collapse when she came close to the barrier, so I'm sure the barrier's effects are real. And it was the same when we entered the Sanctuary as well."

Right before Garfiel's dramatic introduction, Emilia had collapsed from passing through the barrier. Having witnessed its immense power, only a fool would have any doubts about its existence——

Subaru: “——Huh? How come...”

That moment, a shock flashed across Subaru's mind.

On the road back home, he was accompanied by Ryuzu. After saying goodbye to Ryuzu, as they cleared the forest and passed through the barrier, he had felt a sense of incongruity.

Now he had the answer to that unease. Subaru had already noticed this when he saw Ryuzu's reaction as they came close to the barrier.

Subaru: “They were the under the same conditions... But how come when he was that close to the barrier, that bastard Garfiel was still fine and kicking around?”

Ambushing them as soon as they passed through the barrier, Garfiel threw Patrasche and the dragon carriage into the air as if they were nothing.

He certainly didn't use his full strength that time, but compared to Emilia, who fainted as she passed through the barrier, and Ryuzu, who almost collapsed just by going near it, Garfiel's behavior was completely different.

——It was as though his body wasn't affected by the barrier at all.

Frederica: “Owing to his special characteristic, atavism, at first glance, my brother might appear to have more demi-human lineage, but in fact, that is not the case—— The same is true with me.”

Subaru: “If detection of blood is the barrier's criteria for distinguishing humans from half-bloods... To bypass this criteria, one side of the blood would just have to be too thin to detect?”

Frederica: “Although my brother and I have different fathers, neither of them were pure-blooded demi-humans. Both were half-blooded, and combined with our human mother, we were born having inherited only one-quarter of demi-human blood, having been twice diluted this way.”

Subaru: “One-quarter... So that's why you're not rejected by the barrier.”

The barrier that repels half-bloods does not repel quarter-bloods. It sounded almost farcical, but his existing suspicions told him that it was the truth.

On the subject of why Frederica was able to cross the barrier, Ryuzu had only given the ambiguous explanation that she was an exception. But now, Subaru could understand her answer. But then, this would give rise to next question,

Subaru: “Wait. Then does that mean Garfiel can also freely exit the Sanctuary? If he wants to, that guy can just come out regardless of whether the Trials are completed?”

If that was true, then it would be surprising and welcome news.

If he could bring him out without the barrier blocking the way, there would now be a possibility of using his strength to repel Elsa when she attacks the mansion. Originally, Subaru had already abandoned his hopes of repulsing Elsa in this loop and was preparing to evacuate everyone from the mansion, but now—

Subaru: “If that guy can come out, then...”

Frederica: “It’s true, that same as myself, my brother can also venture outside the Sanctuary. When it came time for me to leave the Sanctuary, he was supposed to have come with me, and he had come along as far as the edge of the barrier. But...”

Cutting off her words there, Frederica looked at Subaru, who seemed to have found some glimmer of hope. But her eyes were filled with an emotion so deep and somber that Subaru felt his hopes cool off at once. Seeing him this way, she went on,

Frederica: “My little brother chose to stay behind. And as long as the Sanctuary is not liberated, I don’t think Garfiel will ever set foot outside it. He is a kind and stubbornly sentimental child.”

Subaru: “Sentimental... You don’t mean...”

Seeing Subaru raise his brows as his thoughts arrived at that point, as if confirming his astonishment, Frederica gave a single nod as she covered the corner of her lips with her sleeve,

Frederica: “That child could not leave the residents of the Sanctuary behind while he ventures out alone. He is neither good, nor bad, only a straightforward... and troublesome little brother.”

Arc 4 Chapter 33 - Pathway of Wind

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 11, Chapter 1 “Maid, Maid, Maid”, Part 8

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Complete](#)

Casting down her eyes, Frederica said this of her younger brother.

Instilled within those words was something at once affectionate and terribly complicated. Perhaps, this was only a common sentiment to have towards close family members.

Subaru: “He can physically pass through the barrier, but he won’t do it because of his mental issues... is that essentially what you’re saying?”

Frederica: “The fact is that he refused when I, his older sister, requested this of him. He had followed me all the way to the edge of the barrier, but in the end, he chose to stay inside to be with grandmother rather than to go with me.”

Subaru: “Grandmother... you mean Ryuzu-san?”

Frederica: “That child may be rude and foul-mouthed, but he genuinely adores grandmother. As long as her long-cherished dream has not been fulfilled, he will never leave the Sanctuary.”

Even though he kept calling her old hag and granny, Garfiel obviously held an extraordinarily deep affection toward Ryuzu. Subaru once called him a *tsundere*⁹⁹, and that description was quite accurate in a way.

In any case, this knowledge wouldn’t help the situation very much.

⁹⁹ Character with a personality who is initially polarized, displaying cold, temperate and even hostile sides, before gradually showing a warmer, friendlier side over time.

Subaru: “In the end, it still doesn’t change the fact that passing the Trials and liberating the Sanctuary are the key conditions. It’s about as disappointing as disappointing gets.”

Frederica: “I’m sorry I could not meet your expectations... If there is anything else you wish to ask...”

Subaru: “As long as it’s within your ability to answer, right?”

Frederica: “My apologies.”

At Frederica’s concise affirmation, Subaru sighed through his nose and lined up the questions in his mind. But, considering the flow of the conversation so far, most likely,

Subaru: “Would Roswaal’s true intentions be an alright topic to ask?”

Frederica: “The Master intends to support Emilia-sama and make her the next King of Lugunica. That much I can assert without any doubt on the matter.”

Subaru: “I was asking for his true intentions. I’m sure even you would agree that many of Roswaal’s actions are going against what you just said?”

Frederica: “His methods are indirect and mysterious. I think neither I nor Ram would deny this.”

Saying this with the implication that she and Ram had shared this opinion of Roswaal’s actions between them, Frederica’s face took on a pained expression.

Although she had accepted Subaru’s doubts as only natural, she was nonetheless forbidden to provide him with the key to resolving them. In the end,

Subaru: “You can’t tell me more without permission from Roswaal himself, huh.”

Frederica: “I am truly sorry. But only know this... the Master is Emilia-sama and Subaru-sama’s ally. As long as the two of you possess the intention to prevail in the Royal Selection, that much is assured.”

Subaru: “It totally bothers me how you worded that... But it’s fine. Nevermind about Roswaal for now. So far, I feel like I can trust you, Frederica. But if it ever turns out you’ve fallen head over heels for Roswaal like Ram, I’ll have to seriously rethink our relationship.”

Subaru liked Ram as an individual, but that did not mean he could place absolute trust in her. It was a complicated relationship. At least, Subaru knew that Roswaal held an unshakable, highest place in her heart, and, since Subaru cannot completely trust Roswaal, at the moment, he had no choice but to withhold his judgment of Ram as well.

Subaru: "If you can't tell me Roswaal's true intentions... Can you tell me what it means when they call the Sanctuary the Experimental Grounds? I heard Garfiel calling it that."

Frederica: "Experimental Grounds— Is it."

Subaru: "Also a pile of futureless shit for those who have nowhere to go, he called it that too. After our talk about the demi-humans, I can kind of imagine the part about nowhere to go. So Roswaal has a demi-human fetish or whatever you call that and he's gathering half-bloods who have nowhere to go to live there. But..."

Just the words "Experimental Grounds" gave off a sense of unease, and it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that the gathered half-bloods had been kidnapped in a way. Who knows why Roswaal was doing this? In other words, Emilia may have allied herself with someone she shouldn't have allied with.

Subaru: "To begin with, even if it's not the Witch of Envy, if people found out his family oversaw a facility related to a Witch, the consequences could be huge. I heard that there are no surviving records of this, but the fact is, the Tomb is still right there."

Frederica: "The meaning of the word «Witch» has since taken on an ominous connotation. Even the Master's contractual relationship with the Witch of Greed would certainly not be deemed appropriate by those around him. This concern is precisely in line with Subaru-sama's considerations, I believe."

Subaru: "I'm glad we can agree that the Sanctuary's existence is problematic. Now, wouldn't a title like the «Experimental Grounds» just make that problem even worse?"

Frederica: "...Originally, that place was a hidden village where half-bloods are gathered so the Witch of Greed may conduct a certain experiment. It is unclear what negotiations took place at the time between the Witch and the owner of the land, the House of Mathers, but because of that Contract, succeeding generations of the House of Mathers have managed and maintained the Sanctuary."

Nodding his head, Subaru took in the contents of Frederica's words and sorted the information in his mind. He had already gathered as much from connecting the pieces of information implied by the various people in the Sanctuary. Then, the question would be,

Subaru: "What kind of experiments was the Witch running with half-bloods, and why is Roswaal continuing to keep the Contract even after the Witch's death...?"

Frederica: "The reason for the latter should be simple. The Contract most likely contains the clause «Until the time of the release of the Sanctuary, the Oath to the Witch shall be followed». Unless people are periodically brought into the Sanctuary, the preconditions for the Contract's fulfillment would not exist."

Subaru: "So then, he's now turning that around to create a hidden refuge for half-bloods? By the sound of that, one might even get the impression that Roswaal was running some kind of charity project."

Since discrimination against half-bloods was still a fact, it was necessary to ensure that there was a place where they could live in peace. If Roswaal was indeed fulfilling that role, then Subaru may have to revise his evaluation of him. But,

Subaru: "It doesn't seem like all of the half-bloods want to stay there. In fact, the ones following Ryuzusans who want the Sanctuary to be liberated are in the majority, aren't they?"

Frederica: "...The general prejudice against demi-humans has indeed greatly faded. Compared to our blood, the reason my brother and I entered the Sanctuary was more because we simply had nowhere else to live. One day, the Sanctuary will be released— That is why, I..."

Firmly closing her eyes, Frederica cut off her words. Watching her, Subaru fell silent, and only after some time had passed, did he hesitatingly speak again,

Subaru: "I might just be imagining this... But, was the reason why Frederica left the Sanctuary because of your concerns about what comes after the Sanctuary is released?"

Frederica: "...What makes you think so?"

Subaru: "If you ask me why... your face always seems a little saddened when you talk about the Sanctuary. But you left your home despite this, whether it was for yourself or for others. Then..."

Scratching his cheek, Subaru saw in the back of his mind the tough facade of the golden short haired youth. Like the kindhearted girl in front of his eyes, that man was all words and wouldn't reveal his true feelings at all.

Subaru: "If you're anything like your little brother when it comes to hiding your true feelings, I wouldn't be surprised if there's some embarrassing reason behind why you left. I'm guessing you... probably left to create some place for the people to go once the Sanctuary is liberated, somewhere they wouldn't have to be afraid, am I right? Of course, you're working here to repay your debt of gratitude to Roswaal, but that's not all, is it...? That's kinda what I'm guessing."

Realizing that he was taking huge leaps of logic in his rapid-fire speculation, Subaru held back his embarrassment and stole a glance at Frederica. If she laughed it off, then it would've just been Subaru getting way ahead of himself, but,

Frederica: "When the time comes for the new world to open its doors to them... I hope to be the one to guide them through it."

Muttering this quietly, a smile rose onto Frederica's face.

It was not a mocking smile at an outlandish guess, but a smile of a sense of liberation of having unburdened her heart to another after having seen clearly into herself.

Frederica: "I was raised by that place, but now I want to forge an environment that will foster a desire in the others to leave that place. If I can help even just a little in creating such an environment, then my... undesired birth must have had meaning."

Subaru: "Undesired, that's..."

Frederica: "There is no need to console me. It is as it is. I cannot imagine that my mother grew heavy with me while desiring to do so. The fact is, mother abandoned my little brother and me in the Sanctuary and left. That was her answer... but I do not wish my story to end with only that answer, and that is the reason I am here now."

It was a question to which Frederica had already reached an answer.

Having only glimpsed the surface, Subaru could not possibly affect her with his sympathy. Embracing the answer she had arrived at herself, she would face the endless choices to come with only that answer as her guide.

—“She is strong”, he sincerely thought. It was a conviction strong enough to be admired.

Subaru: “...Does Garfiel know how you truly feel? If he knows and still didn’t come with you, then...”

Frederica: “My little brother is the only person to whom I have told everything. But even so, he would not come with me... for that was the choice he had made. Rather than leaving to procure something difficult to obtain, my little brother chose to remain to protect something easy to lose. We siblings have each chosen a separate path... The story is simply that.”

Subaru: “Protect... Protect, huh. Just by his outer appearance, I’d never have guessed he was the kind of character who’d make that choice. Well, it’s not like people’s hearts can be understood by just looking from the outside anyway.”

Rubbing his jaw, Subaru tilted his cup and drank down all the tea inside in a single gulp before holding back a hiccup. Wiping his lips with the back of his hand, he began again with “Come to think of it”,

Subaru: “We seem to have wandered off-topic, so let’s get back to it. About the name «Experimental Grounds». Can you talk about what kind of experiments they were running...? Or, do you know its contents?”

Frederica: “Unfortunately, I know neither their contents nor their purpose. In fact, from the moment the Witch of Greed died, the continuation of the experiments became impossible. Only the facility remains, and the House of Mathers merely maintains it.”

Subaru: “That’s even more incomprehensible. I personally understand now how important it is to keep promises, but what’s even the point of continuing to keep it when the other side has already been dead for 400 years?”

Frederica: “At least, if it weren’t for the Master’s family upholding that promise, I doubt my brother and I would have passed our childhoods in peace.”

Subaru: “Ah... That’s... I didn’t think of that. Sorry.”

Seeing Subaru sincerely apologizing, Frederica couldn't hold in her giggle. Then, she emptied her cup as well and collected the finished cup from Subaru before standing up from her seat,

Frederica: "We have gone on talking for quite a long while now. Let us save the rest for another time. What do you plan to do next, Subaru-sama?"

Subaru: "I only tagged along to bring the villagers back home in the first place. Now that I've asked what I wanted to ask, I should be heading back... That said, it would be a bit difficult to do that today, so I'll head back tomorrow morning, I guess."

Frederica: "Is that so. In that case, I imagine Petra will be in high spirits tonight and tomorrow morning. But considering how distracted she will get, it's difficult to tell whether that would be a good thing or not."

Subaru: "More than anything, it's nice to see Petra's education progressing nicely... Now, where is Petra, anyway?"

Frederica: "Right now, I believe she would be back in the village greeting everyone that's returned. I instructed her to do so."

As expected, Frederica must have seen through her intentions before she even asked.

Watching her back as she carried off the clattering teacups, Subaru stood up from his chair as well, and counted on his fingers all the remaining things he had to do.

What he managed to hear from Frederica had been only half of what he wanted to hear. But even so, it had given him enough to move forward with his speculations. All that was left now, was to find the final person who might still know more.

Subaru: "It'll probably take a while, but it's time to try combing through this mansion for now..."

At the thought of the heavy labor ahead of him, Subaru slumped his shoulders.

Catching a brief glimpse of Subaru's back as she left the room, Frederica whispered in a quiet voice,

Frederica: "I know neither their contents nor their purpose... but, I do know the result of the Experimental Grounds. When you find out, when you come to understand... what would you think then, I wonder?"

But the contents of her whisper did not reach Subaru, who was now deep in thought.

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Everyone in the mansion knew that Beatrice's Door Crossing was a pain to deal with, but Subaru only truly got a sense of this after returning from the Capital.

His natural intuitive ability to pick from a multitude of choices— Or, more accurately, his ability to go with his gut, was one of the few things about himself that Subaru was rather proud of.

Subaru's special characteristic of managing to select the right option without any hints and for no particular reason was, in a way, just as annoying as his other special characteristic "Can't read the mood", and had made no small contribution to his chances of encountering Beatrice.

Ever since coming back from the Capital, that intuition hadn't been working properly.

Subaru: "That's odd. That should've been every door in the mansion..."

That was the last one. Closing the final bathroom door where he had placed all his hopes, Subaru expressed his disappointment at the result by tilting his head with a sigh.

Since returning from the Capital, he had just been consistently failing at the "Guess where Beako is" quiz. Considering how his hit-rate was almost 100% before, he couldn't exactly blame this on a bad streak. At this point, Subaru had to admit that there was nothing else he could do.

Subaru: "Geez, she must be seriously trying to avoid me."

If Beatrice really put her mind to it, no one could bypass her Door Crossing, Ram once told him this. Yet somehow, Subaru had always managed to defy this common sense. And after a while, Subaru had developed a sense of superiority over Beatrice— In this case, it was not so much that he was able to bypass her Door Crossing, but that he had a greater advantage over Beatrice than anyone else in the mansion.

Subaru: "Even though we parted ways like that, I didn't think you'd go full *hikikomori* because of it... If you won't even show me your face, I can't bicker or apologize or anything."

Subaru had no idea what he might've said that would make her so adamantly refuse to see him. He had no idea, and if he continued being physically cut off like this, he would go on having no idea. And he hated that.

Regardless of what he wanted to learn from her, and regardless of all the pressing issues tying him down, all Subaru wanted now was to see her and talk to her.

It'd be alright even if it meant getting scolded or being looked down upon like a small idiot. But those carefree days are lost. And, only now realizing this, Subaru found he couldn't bear it at all. Although he knew this was a selfish thought.

Subaru: "Puck and Beako, they won't even let out a peep when it comes down to the critical moment."

Whether it was Puck, still hiding out somewhere, or Beatrice, withdrawing into her own space, they both went missing when Emilia and Subaru needed them most.

Can't be counted on at all when there's trouble, they were almost as bad as the gods up in the sky.

But the situation was far too urgent to be soaking in hurt feelings. Knowing that Elsa was closing in on the mansion, but having no means of repelling her, his highest priority now was to evacuate everyone in the mansion.

No matter how he thought about it, Elsa probably had no reason to extend her murdering blades to the unrelated Arlam Village. So, protecting the lives of those in the mansion was the most important task at hand.

Bringing Rem and Petra out wouldn't be difficult. If he appealed to Frederica's sense of professionalism, he should be able to persuade her. The problem was Beatrice who wouldn't see him.

Before, in the loops starting inside the Capital, Subaru had already failed to get her to leave the mansion. That time, he gave up trying to convince her to abandon the mansion because he knew that the Witch Cult's target wasn't the mansion.

But this time was different. Elsa will be invading the mansion and will not hesitate to put everyone to the blade. Even if her target, Emilia, was missing, she would probably set her mind to opening every bowel in the mansion.

Although he had no idea what Beatrice's actual combat strength was, Elsa had been able to hold her own in a pitched battle against the strength of Puck and Emilia combined, and Subaru imagined that she might even be able to match the strength of Wilhelm.

If Beatrice and Elsa ever came into direct contact, Subaru couldn't envision Beatrice winning against her.

Subaru: "Maybe I'm just being way too over-cautious when it comes to Elsa... But after getting killed by someone three times it should be pretty natural to feel this way— Oh."

Rubbing at the phantom pain in his stomach while walking along the hallway, Subaru's legs suddenly stopped. His eyes were fixed on a conspicuously expensive-looking door, to the room at the center of the uppermost floor of the mansion— Roswaal's office.

Subaru was aware that it'd be bad manners to set foot into the Master's room while the Master was away, but,

Subaru: "Right, there was something in this room that I needed to check out."

Saying this, he opened the door and entered without much pomp.

Naturally, the scene that opened before him as he stepped into the office was no different from when he was opening every door in the mansion. Since Roswaal himself hadn't returned, the room still maintained the same orderliness from the time Subaru made Otto organize it.

The original mess of documents and bookshelves had all been neatly arranged by Otto, and there was now a pristine impression to the room as if it had just been thoroughly cleaned. Subaru looked it over before walking to the back of the room, where two bookshelves stood side by side beside the ebony desk.

Subaru: "Behind this bookshelf... is a hidden passage, huh."

Twice, he had already confirmed the existence of this hidden passage— it was probably serving as an escape path in case of emergencies, but as for how to activate it and where the passageway led to, these were all unknown to Subaru.

Subaru: "It was activated when Elsa attacked, so I think it definitely lets you escape somewhere... Although the last time I went in I froze to death."

That memory ended as he was frozen into an ice sculpture alongside the Witch Cultists who had gotten on the wrong side of Puck. He remembered his fingers breaking off and his limbs shattering, and dying almost painlessly, but so much about it was hazy that recalling it did not bring him anything more than a shudder. But death was still death. He had no intention of taking it lightly. In any case,

Subaru: “Unless I find out where this escape route leads, I won’t know what to do if worse comes to worst. It might even come out somewhere in the mansion... Though I’m guessing that’s probably not the case.”

If ensuring safety was the highest priority, confirming the escape route would be an indispensable step. Most likely, it led somewhere into the mountains behind the mansion. And, considering how escape tunnels usually work, if there are some emergency provisions on the way that’d be even better.

Subaru: “Just to be sure, I’ll take a quick look... But, as much as I want to...”

Where’s the gimmick that activates this thing, anyway?

In the meantime, he tried dragging on the bookshelf with all his might to get it to move, but the solidly packed bookshelf wouldn’t budge at all from the strength of Subaru’s arm. Maybe if he took out all the books and left just the shelf, he might be able to move it a little then, but,

Subaru: “No way there’s time for that in a real emergency... There must be a switch to activate it somewhere.”

On that thought, Subaru started fishing into the back of the bookshelves, but didn’t find any secret mechanisms. Although, when Subaru pulled out the second-to-last drawer, he was stunned for a second by the hoard of gemstones stuffed inside.

Subaru: “Time to give up, huh... Unless, maybe it’s not even in the room?”

???: “What’s not in the room?”

Subaru: “Well naturally, it’d be a hidden switch-thingy or something. I wanna see the hidden passage on the other side of the bookshelves but there’s no way to do that unless I find it.”

???: “Oh, the escape path. That’s this statue here.”

Petra tugged on the downcast Subaru's sleeves, and Subaru, looking towards the direction she was pointing at, nodded his head up and down with "Ehhhh",

Subaru: "Placed in the corner of the room, looks like nothing but a normal statue... could this be the gimmick?"

It was a little statue of a person seated in a chair, small enough to be placed on a table. To see something like this in an otherwise unadorned room was indeed somewhat peculiar, but Petra bravely walked up to it without any signs of fear, and,

Tuk, with a small sound, the statue's head twisted. Like it was going to be detached, the statue's head turned a hundred and eighty degrees. Watching the man's neckbone being brutally snapped, Subaru winced his brows. And, the next moment,

Ooo, ooo, ooo—, the sound of a heavy object sliding across the floor reverberated throughout the room. Turning around, Subaru saw the bookshelves parting, revealing a pitch-black entrance wide enough for a single person to pass through.

Seeing the mission-objective escape path making its appearance at last, Subaru lightly balled up his fists and struck out a victory pose.

Subaru: "That's it that's it that's it! That's what I'm looking for! I'm saved!"

Petra: "Huhuuuu, I helped, didn't I. Frederica-neesama told me about this before, it's an escape path in case of emergencies, told me to remember it and all."

Subaru: "Oho, thank you thank you. Now I'll just... Petra, when did you get here!?"

Petra: "You just noticed now!?"

Petra blended into the flow of things so perfectly that it took a while before the contemplative Subaru noticed that she was there. At Subaru's unacceptable response, Petra pouted up her lips,

Petra: "After I ran all the way back, and even helped you out... Subaru-sama, I think that was kinda mean."

Subaru: “No no, I only noticed halfway through that I was talking with someone when I’m supposed to be alone. And then I was too excited to see my objective was complete and that’s why I was a bit late to notice you. Sorrysorry.”

The little girl turned her face away as if stating that she was still angry, and Subaru lightly patted her head while apologizing. Then, turning his eyes to the escape passage again,

Subaru: “By the way, Petra, did Frederica ever tell you where this thing leads?”

Petra: “Yep. Frederica-neesama said it leads to a small cabin in the mountains in the back. There’s another barrier there that’s different from the barrier against the Witchbeasts, so it can’t be found from the outside.”

Subaru: “I see. So it’s a hidden passage after all. But I better go check it out with my own eyes.”

Then it was confirmed that the passageway came out in the mountains, but that would also mean that the tunnel could serve as both an escape route and an invasion route. Subaru rolled up his sleeves, and, pumping himself full of spirit, stepped towards the entrance. And Petra’s quiet footsteps followed behind him.

Subaru: “Oh, you’re coming too, Petra?”

Petra: “Can’t I?”

Subaru: “It’s not that you can’t, but there’s probably not going to be anything interesting, you know. I’m only going in since I’m curious where it leads to, and after that I’ll be coming right back.”

Petra: “It’s my break time right now, so I’m free to do what I want. So you won’t mind if I come?”

Tugging on the hems of his shirt, Petra looked up at Subaru with puppy-like eyes. Not having the heart to leave her behind like this, Subaru sighed and gave out a wry smile, and,

Subaru: “We really are just going there and coming right back, you know. You sure are curious, Petra.”

Petra: “If I wasn’t curious, I wouldn’t be here, so... I’m glad I’m curious.”

Hearing Petra's reply, he wasn't really sure what she was trying to say. Nonetheless, smoothing it over with a smile, Subaru took her outstretched hand and stepped into the passageway.

The dark, hidden passage gave way to a spiraling staircase, while the materials of the walls themselves glowed with a pale blue light. Although they wouldn't be losing sight of the path downstairs, seeing that the tunnel was leading underground, Subaru looked back,

Subaru: "This stairway is pretty long and dark, be careful not to slip."

Petra: "If I slip will you save me?"

Subaru: "I'll have to hug you while tumbling all the way down the stairs, you know... If I end up in a coma and can never walk again that'll be a way too miserable sight."

Petra: "If that happens, I'll take care of Subaru-sama for the rest of your whole life."

Subaru: "I'm glad, but the process is way too terrifying!"

With this exchange, Subaru took the lead as the two of them began heading down the stairs. A cold wind swept up from below, sending thoughts of a non-existent Puck into Subaru's mind as a chill ran up his spine. It was not that he was afraid of the non-existent future of a frozen death, but,

Subaru: "It's no fun being so quiet while going down, and Petra might be getting scared, so let's talk about something."

Petra: "Subaru-sama, you know your palm is getting kind of sweaty?"

Subaru: "Petra must be getting scared so let's talk about something! How was everyone at the village!?"

Seeing Subaru intent on sticking to the concerned-for-a-little-girl narrative, Petra cast him a compassionate gaze and went along with it. And so, carrying on the miscellaneous conversation this way to keep the silence at bay, they continued down the stairs for several more minutes— When the staircase ended, and they arrived at the familiar narrow passage.

Further down the passage, there will be a door, and beyond that door would be a zone unknown to Subaru.

Subaru: “According to the feeling it gives out, we should still be right underneath the mansion. If this path leads all the way to the back mountains, it must be a quite a long tunnel.”

Petra: “Escape route, escape path, tunnel, can’t we call it one thing?”

Subaru: “You’re right... Then, since the wind might as well be coming all the way from Mexico, let’s call it Santana¹⁰⁰.”

Petra: “Ah, careful don’t trip, there’s a bump there.”

Just like this, Petra beautifully ignored Subaru’s random comment. Seeing her anti-Subaru capabilities improve so much in such a short period of time, Subaru felt both pleased and a little lonely.

Maintaining this nostalgic sentiment as they continued through the passageway, they soon arrived at a slightly wider area. Straight ahead, a door emerged out of the darkness, confirming that this was the room. Back then, it was here that the frozen figures of the Witch Cultists lined up in this claustrophobic space, but naturally, there was no trace of that this time. Confirming this, Subaru spilled a quiet sigh of relief.

Subaru: “This should go without saying, but, it’s good that no *shinteki gaishou no kioku*¹⁰¹ got triggered, huh. Anyways, so far, we should be about a third of the way to the mountain cabin, right?”

Petra: “The wind’s so cold... it must be from the other side of the door.”

While Subaru was busy feeling relieved, beside him, Petra was eagerly waiting with anticipation for the new *men*¹⁰² on the opposite side of the door. With “Yeah”, Subaru nodded in agreement,

Subaru: “Last time I touched the door I got an instant *shoubu ari*¹⁰³. So everything after that point is still completely unknown... Well, guess we’ll make it up as we go.”

¹⁰⁰ Reference to the Santa Ana (or Santana, for short) winds that affect southern California and northern Baja California (for more info, see [here](#)).

¹⁰¹ English flip. Means “memories of psychological trauma” (心的外傷の記憶), originally “トラウマ スイッチ” (trauma switch).

¹⁰² English flip. Means “(video game) level/stage” (面), originally “ステージ” (stage).

¹⁰³ English flip. Means “game over!/match!” (勝負あり), originally “ガメオベラ” (game over).

Having made up this resolve, Subaru unceremoniously placed his hand on the door.

And then, pushing it open, he felt an icy wind washing over his face, flooding into the small room—

Subaru: “—Ah?”

Simultaneous with that quiet sound, Subaru noticed that something had struck his belly.

Looking down, he stared at the left side of his waist that had taken the impact. Some kind of skewer was sticking out of it, and to prove that this had happened recently, the butt-end of it was still quivering.

—Watching, as little by little blood seeped into his clothes, Subaru’s throat froze.

Petra: “Yyaa—h!?”

In place of the choked-up Subaru, Petra, who noticed the same wound, shrieked at the top of her voice. Its high-pitched sound echoed through the corridor, lashing upon Subaru’s eardrums.

In the instant the pain caught up, still not understanding what had happened, Subaru’s mind swam with all its might, trying to think of something to do.

Petra’s shriek trailed off. The echoing corridor was deprived of sound, until only her noise could be heard. In a world where he should not be hearing anything, Subaru heard that sound.

Of footsteps, and a knife being pulled out of its sheath—

Elsa: “Now, let’s fulfill that promise—”

Licking her lips with a red tongue, it was the voice of a murdering monster trembling at the premonition of slaughter.

Arc 4 Chapter 34 - World Ending

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 11, Chapter 2 “Girl’s Gospel”, Parts 1-5

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Complete](#)

He sensed the portents of incoming pain.

It was an unpleasant sensation, but ever since coming to this world, there had been no shortage of life-threatening injuries in his life. That sensation told him— These next few seconds will decide victory or defeat.

While Petra’s shriek echoed down the narrow passage, Subaru reached out his hand towards the two skewer-like things sticking out of the left side of his waist. He knew that the instant he touches them, it will begin. And so, before that, Subaru forced his mind to turn at an incredible rate.

Two darts, not fatal wounds. There were still a few seconds before the pain catches up. Petra was frozen in place. Where did the attack come from? His hand was still touching the door. The high-pitched echo went on. And, in its midst, a murderous voice had snuck into Subaru’s ears.

—Elsa’s.

Before his eyes, he saw a shadow lurking in the unlighted void. Its posture was low, almost crawling, as if poisoning itself to strike. It was Elsa.

The projectile that skewered him through the waist was thrown from the other end of the passage. That disgustingly accurate control aimed directly at the bowels as a matter of doctrine. He almost wanted to applaud.

A stupid thought, a frivolous idea. Why was Elsa here now? There was supposed to be a grace period. Why was she hiding in a hidden passage that no one was supposed to know about? And how did she know?

All that can wait. Questions can come later. At this moment just focus on survival and force all brain cells to fire——!

Subaru: “——Shaaaaaaaaamaaaaaaaaaaaaaaac!!”

No weapons, no means to intercept, horrendously unprepared and unready.

Faced with this split-second situation, there was only one thing Subaru could do—— Or rather, he had already decided in his heart that he would take that one action the moment he encountered Elsa, regardless of appearances.

Answering Subaru’s call, his damaged Gate rallied his body’s Mana at his chant. Black smoke spouted out from the tip of Subaru’s extended right hand, covering the passage in darkness.

A pitch-blackness darker than light-given shadows engulfed the narrow space, instantly dividing Subaru and the immediate threat before him. The expelled smoke had no effect of restricting actual movement. Charge forward, and it will give way like brittle mist. But,

Subaru: “Wall of Incomprehension, if it’s possible to scale you then scale you I sh——Gaaaaaagghhhh!!
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Before he could finish his taunt, the delayed attack of excruciating pain assaulted Subaru. Beginning with his left hip, the searing heat coursed throughout his body, and his scream sounded out as though the roots of his brain and his lower waist were being pierced by red-hot spits. On top of this were the consequences of spellcasting in his damaged state. Drawing more Mana than his body could afford, he felt the strength of his body sucked dry, and, overcome with exhaustion and fatigue, he fell to his knees.

Yet, it was then that something pulled him from the verge of collapse,

Petra: “Subaru——!”

A small and soft sensation was gripping onto his lifeless hand. He looked, and saw Petra worrying over him, her long lashes trembling and on the brink of tears.

¹⁰⁴ It’s possible this is a reference to something, or even a Japanese idiom, as “無理解の壁” yielded some... incomprehensible results.

Within her eyes, was fear of circumstances that were beyond her comprehension, as well as rejection of the existence of the preposterous threat closing in before her. But most of all, they held the deep colors of worry for Subaru's safety.

The moment he recognized it, the wrenching pain of his mangled nerves and the soul-rending sense of loss were all forgotten in an instant. And before that effect could fade, he squeezed back on Petra's hand.

Subaru: "Anyways, let's go up—!"

Since they couldn't go forward, their only escape was to go back the same way they came. Even Subaru himself wasn't sure how long Shamac would last. So far, the only improvement was that his body didn't faint after blowing out all his Mana since his body must have grown accustomed after so many uses.

Regardless, he mustn't allow the opportunity granted by the cover of the black mist to slip away—

Subaru: "Gukh... Aagahhh!?"

The moment he stepped forward to run, again he was struck by the pain of something sharp gouging into his flesh.

Turning his eyes to the source of the pain, he found four more metal darts nailed into his back from his right shoulder to the base of his neck. Fortunately, the piercing wounds weren't deep, but the pain of having multiple darts as thick as his pinky fingers burrowed into his flesh was only intensified by the sight.

Subaru: "She can see...!?"

She could see through Shamac's smoke? For an instant, Subaru thought this, but he immediately realized that could not be so. Then, intuitively, he understood what Elsa must have done from the other side of the fog.

Having judged the black smoke to be a threat and deciding that diving in would be dangerous, Elsa had blindly thrown her darts through the mist without aiming at anything in particular.

The passage was narrow enough to be filled with three Subarus side-by-side. If she had the control to aim at the very center of the passage, there was a high probability of hitting somewhere on his back.

The moment he realized this, Subaru yanked on Petra's arm and embraced her against his chest. "Hya!" she squeaked, and just as she got out of the way, the same metal darts as the ones sticking to Subaru's body whizzed past.

If he hadn't pulled her away, the darts would have lined up precisely with her head.

Subaru: "Fuck my life...!"

Spitting out saliva laced with blood, Subaru shook his head as he sprinted down the passage towards the mansion, pulling on the lagging Petra's arm to force her onward.

His vision was flickering in pain. The world was flashing black and red. A thin blue light was glowing from the dim passageway. That, and the alternating red and black blended into one as the world grew indistinct.

Only a single moment of attack and defense had completely depleted Subaru's energy and stamina.

Even if he returned to the mansion like this, he would have no immediate means of breaking out of this situation. And, relying only on the hope in front of his eyes, he clenched his jaw and continued to run.

The terror coursing up his neck in that instant was perhaps the sensation of impending death, which was only perceptible due to his countless experiences with dying.

Subaru: "———!"

With that terrible fear guiding his neck to turn, his black pupils saw the tracks of death.

"Slicing through the air" would be too simplistic of a description, for the incoming blade was slaying the very air. The curved blade that was the greatest and vilest weapon in Elsa's arsenal—the kukri knife, bearing down with its own momentum, was spinning vertically with tremendous speed towards Subaru and Petra's backs.

A velocity that made reaction impossible. Sheer power that made parrying unthinkable.

Faced with such a thing, the fact that Subaru could make this sudden motion with his arm was nothing short of miraculous.

He reached out his right hand to catch the tip of the knife with his fingers, and indeed managed to pinch it between his index and middle finger—but without reducing even a fraction of the blade's velocity or power, the middle, ring and pinky fingers on Subaru's right hand scattered into the air.

The knife went on to cut vertically through Subaru's arm straight from the wrist to the elbow, splitting it in two. The chopped off outer flap of the arm slammed into the wall, as the spraying mist of blood dyed the passage and Subaru in dots of red. Screaming. Shrieking. Creating a noise that made one wonder if his throat will break, rip and crack.

His vision filled with red, and his molars fractured under the force of his clenching jaws. He lifted his half-sheared arm. It was red. Only red. He saw something white. But it was instantly turned red. He couldn't think of this thing as belonging to him anymore. It was only an unnecessary object, giving off pain.

Cut it off. Go away. I have no use for an organ that only gives off pain. I don't want you. Go away, begone, fuck off. Fuck you! Just die! die! die!

—A touch.

There was the touch of a hand holding onto his. Opposite the limb of nothing but pain, there was still a warmth here. The moment he felt it, his scream stopped. His throat was broken. The neurons in his brain, having gone far beyond their capacity for feeling pain, burst. He forgot the pain. But not that warmth.

Drawing in his arm, he swung out his steps, and shaking his throat that had lost its voice, Subaru ran through the passage painted with blood. Legs. So heavy. Arms. So heavy. Was he pulling them, or were they pulling him? He didn't even know. Didn't know. Didn't know. And didn't want to know.

End of the passage. Back to the staircase. Run up the spiraling stairs and he will be in the mansion. What will he do once he's in the mansion? Who will, who could, who can help him there, Emilia, Rem—?

Subaru: "I... wi... ll...!"

Not let it end here. It is not over yet. It cannot end yet.

He couldn't see a way. He didn't find anything. He tried to reach, but hadn't grasped a thing. But how could he throw everything away here?

He looked up. It was a long way to the top of the spiraling stairs. His legs were tangled. His tongue was numb. Life was draining through the blood dripping from his arm. Eroding, fading, he drew up the warmth of his left hand. And,

???: “—baru-sama!!”

The call of a wild beast. And the sound of a heavy object landing from above. On the steps in front of Subaru's eyes, he saw a broad back. Shrouded within the smoke and dust, was an expensive black apron-dress. Her long golden hair swaying in the icy wind, she rose up from her crouched landing.

Seeping through the stern face that turned around— was a familiar emotion of worry,

Subaru: “Fre... deric...”

Frederica: “Don't talk! That wound is... too serious.”

Just as he recognized her and tried calling her name, Frederica's face turned pale at the sight of Subaru's wounds. She looked painfully at Subaru's half-sheared-off right arm, and then, trailing her eyes over the blood that covered half of his body,

Frederica: “A...”

With a gasp so quiet as to disappear, she swallowed her breath. That was probably how shocking Subaru's dreadful state was. By now, owing to the endogenous anesthetics flooding through his brain, Subaru himself had already lost sensitivity to the pain. Breathing raggedly, there was saliva endlessly dripping down the corner of his mouth. Spitting out the overflowing bloody foam in his mouth, Subaru was trying to tell Frederica something,

Subaru: “Auuoagh—!”

Frederica: “—Careful!!”

From across the darkness, the Kukri knife came slashing once more.

The revolving blade pregnant with death was aimed directly at Frederica's head. Seeing the shimmer of steel, Subaru raised his voice, and Frederica reacted by drawing something from her waist. With a flash—the darkness of the passageway was scattered by sparks, and the curved blade was deflected with a high-pitched ring. What had achieved this was,

Frederica: "It seems we have an intruder."

Crossing her arms as she said this— There were now clawed gauntlets attached to Frederica's hands. From that self-possessed reaction, it would seem that she was facing a familiar prey.

In a way, that rugged equipment was all too fitting for someone like Frederica. Ripping the air as she readied her arms before her, Frederica looked back at Subaru,

Frederica: "Get to the mansion. Signal when you're at the top. Then I'll disengage."

Subaru: "Bu... t..."

Frederica: "With your injuries you'll only get in the way. —Please take care of Petra."

Though he wanted to stay, Frederica's final pleading words pushed Subaru from behind. Swallowing the rest of what he was about to say, Subaru pulled Petra's tiny body close. Compared to dragging her by the arm as he ran, he could be faster if he held her. Petra entered his arm without resistance, and Subaru backed away towards the stairs,

Subaru: "D... on't die..."

Frederica: "Of course not—I'm not halfway through yet."

Dragging his legs, reluctant to leave, Subaru dashed up the stairs with his sights set on the top. Making his way up the spiral, the sounds of blade clashing on blade followed him from below. The narrow space robbed Elsa of her mobility, so in a direct confrontation it would be a match of raw power. In that case, Frederica may even have a chance of winning— At least, that was the hope he wished to cling to.

Spitting out his crushed molars, Subaru cursed at his useless legs. Faster, defter, every second he spent climbing the stairs brought Frederica a second closer to her fate. Faster, faster, to the top, to the top, to the top—

Subaru: “I... m... here!!”

Reaching the top, panting with ragged breaths, his knees dropped onto the carpet. Crawling in that collapsed state, he stuck his head into the passage and shouted down the stairs.

Subaru: “Fre, derica! Now—!!”

He could seal the passage to cut Elsa off as soon as Frederica reaches the top of the stairs. Realizing this as he shouted, Subaru turned and tumbled toward the statue-switch that controlled the door. Taking its head in his hand, he waited for Frederica to fly out of the gap. But—

Subaru: “—Wh...”

The overwhelming crashing roar of a tremendous impact and collapse lashed onto Subaru’s ears. Falling building materials breaking into each other spewed up a swirling plume of smoke as it sent tremors through the entire mansion.

What happened... Subaru left the statue’s side and returned to the passage. Then, peering inside— he saw that the winding, spiraling stairs had collapsed as if having vanished into thin air.

Subaru: “This... ah.”

This destruction was not the consequence of shoddy architecture. Breaking off so cleanly without causing the slightest damage to the passage itself, it was nothing like an unanticipated collapse. It was by design that the stairwell collapsed on its own when some mechanism was activated.

Perhaps it was meant for covering one’s tracks after escaping, or, like now, to guard against the passage from being used as an invasion route, though he couldn’t be sure which it was. The only thing that was certain was that,

—At this point, Frederica could no longer come back up.

The possibility of Elsa coming up the stairs had been eliminated, yet it also meant that Frederica had doomed herself. Maybe she could defeat Elsa through pure combat strength and come back around the mountains, but Subaru knew, deep down, that this was impossible.

The moment Subaru thought this, his forgotten wounds twanged with pain as he spat out clots of blood. The darts that burrowed within his neck, shoulder, and waist began to eat at his flesh. He tried to pull them out, but his fingers kept slipping, and the fear of mass bleeding made his fingers tremble unresponsively.

Subaru: “No...w’s not... the time to be doing this... Idiot, I’m...”

There was no time to stop his feet or his thoughts. Whether Frederica’s survival was doomed still depended on Subaru’s next actions.

Enduring the pain and propping himself on his knees, Subaru tried to stand himself up. But suddenly, he remembered Petra who should still be in his arms. He was holding her when he fled into the office, but where had she—

Subaru: “Pe—tra...?”

Turning his head around, Subaru found her on the opposite end of the room— Petra was near the statue. She was lying on her side as if sleeping. He must have inadvertently dropped her in the chaos.

Perhaps she lost consciousness from exhaustion and would not respond to Subaru’s calls. Most likely, in a state of extreme fear and fatigue, she had fainted. As much as he was worried about Frederica’s safety, he must follow her instruction and keep Petra safe. Forcing his trembling knees to stand, Subaru dragged his legs to where Petra had fallen. And, picking up the little girl from the floor,

—He saw the curved blade sticking out from the back of the fallen girl’s head to the base of her neck.

Large volumes of blood had seeped from the wound, and a part of her brain had spilled from the fracture in the back of her head. Her soft, chestnut colored hair had been dyed the deep shade of blood, and her gentle, warm palm will never move again.

He held up his right hand. A miserable clump of flesh missing three of its fingers. When he reached out to stop the curved blade, it had passed right through his arm and struck Petra. Even offering up this much, he hadn't protected anything.

Subaru: “———aaaaaaaAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHH!!!!”

From his shattered throat, he howled out that bloody wail.

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Limping across the mansion's carpet, Subaru headed toward the west wing with the expression of a ghost. Cradled within his arms was Petra's corpse. He had covered her with a white sheet, so that no one would see the sight of her death.

The look of surprise was still frozen on her lifeless face, which proved the sole consolation that her death was instantaneous. It would have been too cruel if she had to experience the same pain as Subaru on top of losing her life. But he couldn't save her. There was no consolation to be found anywhere.

Subaru: “liii...”

Didn't he come back so that he could save everyone in the mansion? Didn't he resolve to do everything in his power to help them?

Once again, he had allowed Petra to be caught in this spiral of death. This was already the third time Subaru had seen Petra die— All of those times, he could have done something to prevent the way they ended.

But unlike last time, when everything was initiated by the Witch Cult, this time, there was a decisive difference.

If Subaru didn't want Petra to be caught in this spiral, he could have opposed Frederica's decision to take Petra as an apprentice.

He should have known the danger of being at his and Emilia's sides.

Subaru: “If I... If only... There’s no end to them.”

If he were to talk about what he should or could have done, it would go on forever. Subaru knew this. And yet, although he knew, Subaru’s weakness was such that he could not bear but to think about them.

In accordance to those broken thoughts, his steps dragged on heavily. The unstoppable flow of blood left a trail of dark-red spots on the carpet, and every single step sent wrenching pain grinding at his nerves.

One step, and then another, the sound of his flesh and spirit shaving away, pain. Even receiving this punishment was a grace. If Subaru had sinned, then Subaru deserved to be punished. So that the girl in his arms, the woman who stayed so Subaru could escape, and—

Subaru: “Rem...”

At the end of his path, the girl who went on sleeping— No calamity must be permitted to touch her.

The west wing. At last, he had reached the servant’s quarters. Despite choosing the shortest path from the office on the highest floor, it felt like it took a lifetime to drag his wounded body here. The room he was trying to reach was opposite the stairs, at the furthest end of the hallway.

What he would do once he got there was not on his mind even now. His only objective was to get there. His only objective was to touch the girl lying there— For he had already lost the will to live.

He had lost too much blood, and carried away with that flow of blood, his determination and resolve had already drained from his body. This time he had lost too much. Shrouded in this sense of loss, he didn’t seem to be even capable of raising his head as he walked.

So, at least, let it end by her side.

By the side of the only girl in this world whom Subaru could reveal his weakness to.

Dragging a trail of blood behind him, half leaning on the wall, turning that meager intent into obsession, Subaru’s body arrived in front of his destined room— in front of Rem’s bedroom.

Setting the cradled Petra down against the wall, he pulled aside the sheets and closed her eyelids. It was the only thing he could do to dress up her appearance in death. Touching her cheek, and lightly tracing his finger on her lip, he lowered his head at her cold empty vessel,

Subaru: “Sorry... I’m so sorry... I’m a stupid... useless... h.”

There should have been a way, but Subaru’s own stupidity didn’t allow him to see it. The result was Petra being the sacrifice, and his words of apology could no longer reach her.

His falling tears landing on Petra’s knees, Subaru shook his head, and lifted the sheets over Petra’s lifeless face once more. Then, standing up, he turned around.

Elsa: “—I think it was rather mean to leave me there like that.”

On the other end of the hallway, stepping on the same stairs Subaru had just limped down from, was a gorgeous black-haired woman. Playing with the ends of her long black braid with the fingers of one hand, she dangled her blood drenched Kukri knife from the other.

A black mantle over a black bodysuit. She was wearing the same combination as when he saw her in the Capital. She was supposed to have been fighting Frederica, but there was not a single trace of battle visible. Whether it was in terms of wounds, or fatigue.

The fact that she appeared here— and the way she appeared, undeniably proved what must have happened to Frederica.

Adding one more to the list of people his apologies could not reach, all Subaru could do was look up to the ceiling, cursing his own incompetence.

Elsa: “You managed to walk this way with those wounds. I’m very impressed.”

Subaru: “Is... there a prize for that? Your life would do fine...”

Elsa: “Can I take that as a profession of love? That my life is your heart’s desire?”

Subaru: “I’ll trample it to mush... Hand it over...”

Wanting to vomit at Elsa’s non-sequitur reply, Subaru glared at the murderer as he stood himself up against the wall. Turning up his gaze, he locked Elsa’s face in his sights. Her eyes were looking up and down Subaru’s torn-up body,

Elsa: “The aroma of blood, the scent of rage, the fragrance of death... Ahh, you are exquisite in every sense. Your intestines are exactly to my liking too, I’m all too pleased to say.”

Subaru: “Abnormal bitch... What’re you going on about...”

Embracing herself, with an expression of ecstasy on her face, Elsa looked at Subaru with a gaze that could not contain its arousal. Even though she was a beautiful woman, those deranged, abnormal eyes injected only disgust and horror into Subaru.

Seeing an emotion of rejection surfacing on Subaru’s face, Elsa retained that debauched glamour on her cheeks,

Elsa: “It’s nice to talk to you, but... I wouldn’t want to be scolded for losing sight of my objective. That Spirit and the half-devil girl I met in the Capital, do they happen to be home?”

Subaru: “You should’ve phoned in before coming, would’ve saved you the trouble. We would’ve hired some mercenaries and put on a grand big welcome.”

Elsa: “You’re not going to answer. Then, I better ask your bowels.”

Opening her red lips, sensuously wetting it with her peach-colored tongue, she lifted her knife, and smiled in ecstasy as she licked the drops of blood off the side of its blade.

Then, lowering her posture, she made the blade scream as she dashed forward like a spider. Too fast. Can’t imagine intercepting at all. But,

Subaru: “Like hell am I gonna die at your hands...!”

Saying this, Subaru pushed open the door to Rem’s bedroom.

Elsa furrowed her brows at Subaru’s action, unable to understand, and he felt just the slightest satisfaction to see that reaction.

He had already resigned himself to the fact that there was no way out. His wounds were deep, and he could not stop his life from seeping away. The fate of this loop was like a candle flame in the wind. In that case, at least he will not give Elsa the satisfaction.

He had no wish to die by those blades. If he will fall into Elsa's hands, he would rather die first. But before that, he will not allow her to be violated. It would be a euphemism to call it "the bitter choice", but it would mean nothing more than a one-sided lovers' suicide.

If the alternative was the way Petra and Frederica fell under Elsa's blade,

Then, in this world that was ending, he will at least dispatch her with his own hands—

Subaru: "And follow you right after..."

She will go on ahead, and he will follow behind. With this resolve, he turned into Rem's bedroom—

Subaru: "—Huh?"

—Lined with bookshelves, row after row, the Forbidden Library welcomed Subaru as he was preparing for the end.

Arc 4 Chapter 35 - The Young Girl's Gospel

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 11, Chapter 2 “Girl's Gospel”, Part 6

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Complete](#)

Enclosed on all sides, the room was filled with the choking scent of old books.

Stepping through the opened door, stricken by this sight and smell, Subaru's mouth gaped open wordlessly as he realized, half a second too late, that he had stepped onto a floor that did not belong to the place he was hoping for—

—And that this delay in his awareness proved fatal.

Subaru: “The Forbidden Library!?”

He had reached the place which he couldn't find while searching all throughout the mansion. The undesired timing and the unforeseen opportunity created a vacuum in Subaru's heart, robbing him of the time before the door slammed shut behind him.

Subaru: “—!”

As though shoved forth by a wind from the outside, Subaru's body was sucked into the Library. With the same momentum, the door clamped shut, sending a small breeze tickling the back of Subaru's neck.

Turning around at the violent sound, confirming that the room had been separated from the hallway, he understood.

Why the Forbidden Library opened to him here, and why it had shut its doors.

Subaru: “O—open it—!!”

Reaching for the doorknob, he noticed the state of his right arm and reached out the left one as well. His blood-drenched fingers wrenched violently at the knob, sending loud clatters into the air, but although the knob was turning, it conveyed none of his intentions to the door. The screech of the knob's futile rotation only served to compound Subaru's agitation.

Beatrice: "—No matter how much you struggle to get out, it's no use, you know."

A voice flew to Subaru's ears from behind while he was desperately wrestling with the door.

Swinging around, and leaning his back against the door flap— He saw the girl in the depths of the Library, staring directly at him with a cold and indifferent gaze.

Long, cream-colored curls and an extravagant dress. A small body, and cute, yet peevish features. She was every bit the same girl that Subaru knew.

Subaru: "Beatrice..."

Beatrice: "You look quite terrible, I suppose. You'll dirty the Library's floor, so don't move around so much..."

Subaru: "Open the door! Now! Let me out, now!!!!"

Seeing her coldly staring at his wounds, Subaru screamed, ignoring everything Beatrice said. Not hearing her instruction to "stop bleeding everywhere", Subaru flailed his wretched, profusely bleeding right arm,

Subaru: "Why, why did you show up now!? Why! Why now!?!? Let me go back!!! Hurry! Now!! Right now!!!!"

Beatrice: "...And what will you do once you go back, I suppose? Even if you go back with these unsightly wounds, Betty has no idea what you could possibly do."

Subaru: "I know better than anyone that I can't do anything!! But it doesn't matter!!"

He did not want to go back in order to face Elsa, but to enter the room where he was supposed to be, to go to that sleeping girl's side, and—

Subaru: "If I'm in the Library, and Door Crossing is lifted... Then that murderer would, the room..."

When she realizes that Subaru had vanished, that lunatic would probably find herself tilting her head. Before searching the mansion for the disappeared Subaru, she would find the lonely girl sleeping inside. What that malicious murderer would do when she finds her, defenseless in her sleep— did not warrant a second thought.

Subaru: “That’s why—!”

Beatrice: “It’s already too late, you know.”

Subaru, roaring at the top of his lungs as if to shake off this surging apprehension, was instantly washed over by Beatrice’s abrupt and poignant whisper.

Seeing her cast down her eyes and shake her head, for a moment, Subaru froze. His brain chewed over the meaning of her words, and his thoughts came to a halt.

—What did this girl say just now?

Subaru: “Too late... what do you... mean?”

Beatrice: “The reason why you think you want to go back to that room... is already gone, I suppose.”

Subaru: “———”

In front of Subaru’s disjointed question, Beatrice gave this dispassionate reply.

His throat choked up, his eyes opened to their limits, and, by the time he realized it, he had fallen to his knees. His shoulders dropped, his head faced downwards, and a terrible ring echoed within his skull.

Pain, pain, the forgotten pain revived as noise eroded Subaru’s consciousness. It would be alright if only everything could be drowned in that noise and be swept away, he honestly thought. He didn’t want to understand any of it. He didn’t want to realize it. Nonetheless,

Beatrice: “Your wounds, let me see them, I suppose. They’re too miserable, I can’t stand looking at them.”

Walking up to Subaru, who had collapsed onto the floor, Beatrice folded her knees and looked over the wounds on his right arm, left waist and right shoulder, casting him a frown of reproach. A faint light

covered over her hand, which she pressed against his most severely wounded right arm— replacing the heat of pain, something of an itch coursed through his arm. And, along with the sound of splashing water, the fabric of his flesh began to mend.

The bleeding stopped, and slowly, and slowly, answering to the light, a membrane spread over the open wound as the sheared off area was repopulated with cells spurring to recovery. Although,

Beatrice: “It will take time to return to its original width, and your missing fingers won’t be coming back, I suppose... The wounds on your hip and shoulder—”

Subaru: “...What the hell are you doing.”

A voice devoid of emotion leaked from Subaru’s lips.

Intent on healing his wounds, Beatrice furrowed her brows and held out her palm, emanating with healing energy, in front of Subaru’s eyes,

Beatrice: “I don’t like this either. But I have no choice, so I’m treating your wounds. Betty is the only one in the mansion who can heal such extensive wounds, I suppose. You should thank me you know.”

Subaru: “Heal... my wounds...? What for...?”

Beatrice: “These wounds would be life-threatening if left alone, I suppose. And though I don’t particularly care whether you live or die, I would rather you not die here.”

Closing one eye, perhaps disregarding Subaru’s words as delirium from his injuries, Beatrice uttered this cold reply as she prepared to continue healing. But,

Subaru: “———Agh.”

Beatrice: “Ah.”

Sensing the healing waves burying away his wounds, Subaru swung his injured arm aside, prompting a small sound of surprise from Beatrice.

He taxed his trembling knees and rolled onto his side, painting large swathes of the Forbidden Library’s floor in red as he distanced himself from her, all the while keeping his ghastly stare fixed upon her face.

Panting with ragged breaths, his frantic movements dislodged the darts buried in his hip. Shrill clatters rang out as they landed on the floor, followed by the sound of free-flowing liquid that was blood flowing from his wounds. Streaming down his thighs, and spreading out from his knees, it flooded over the floor in a river of blood.

Beatrice's breath stopped at this sight, while Subaru bared his teeth,

Subaru: "I don't need any healing...! If you don't care whether I live or die...! Why did you bother saving me!?!?"

Beatrice: "That's because... you were too unsightly. I couldn't bear to look..."

Subaru: "Why... Why me!? If you wanted to save someone, why didn't you save Petra... or Frederica!? If we had your help, even if we didn't fight, we could've just ran away... Anything would have been better...!"

If they had Door Crossing to separate them from the outside world, they would have been able to stay beyond the reach of Elsa's relentless pursuit. If used the correct way, there is no better ability specialized for escape. Whether it was Petra, who didn't run away until it was too late, or Frederica, who stayed behind to cover their escape, or Rem, sound asleep in her bed—!

Subaru: "You could've saved all of them...! I'm weak, I'm stupid... but you could have done it... So why didn't you...?"

Beatrice: "Why would Betty... There was no reason for Betty to help those people you spoke of, I suppose. No reason that I know of. It was none of my business."

Subaru: "In that case...! You had no reason to save me either, did you!?"

Watching Beatrice reluctantly shaking her head at his plea, Subaru slammed the floor with his right arm that was still in the process of healing.

Subaru: "Why did you help me!? Why did you save me!? Was it all just on a whim? What made me any different from the rest of them!? Rem was always a good girl, there were things Frederica still wanted to do... and Petra was still so small... they were all far more worth saving than me! Didn't their lives also have meaning... have value!?"

Beatrice: "Value? Meaning? Why should Betty respect such conceited inventions, I suppose. Your arrogance is beyond intolerable, human!"

Subaru: "Where the hell is the logic in that!? First you wouldn't see me when I was looking all over for you, then you choose a critical time like this to show up! If you didn't see any value in me or those girls... You should've just kept minding your own business and stayed shut up in this room!!"

Why did she have to appear now, after everything was already too late?

She could have stayed hidden so that even Elsa couldn't have detected her, but now, once Elsa realizes where Subaru had gone, Beatrice's existence could very well have been exposed.

In that case, there was a chance that even this girl wouldn't be able to escape the murderer's blade. So why did she take such risks to let a half-dead Subaru in?

Why did she save him now, when he had already lost the will to live, and wanted only death?

Subaru: "I don't care if you did this on a whim, but... If you want to save me... If you still have even a shred of desire to help me... Then kill me... now..."

Beatrice: "What... are you saying, I suppose..."

Subaru: "Now!! Me!! Kill me now!! Before everything is written down, before everything becomes irreversible! Kill me! Kill!! Kill me!!!"

Spewing up blood mixed with spit, clawing at the floor with both his maimed right hand and his remaining left hand, Subaru shrieked out his appeal.

Before his reason to live becomes entirely lost, before his inaction leads him to an unrecoverable future.

He shrieked for this useless, powerless, incompetent mass to be extinguished from this world.

But Beatrice did not accept his plea that was carried within the shrieking of his very soul. She shook her head, and with a look confusion and displeasure emerging on her face,

Beatrice: "I don't understand, I don't understand at all. I can't understand you humans, I suppose. Why are you... Why would you say such a thing now, when you still have your life?"

Subaru: "You aren't saving me by saving my life! Right now this life is nothing but agony! It shouldn't be here, I shouldn't be here... If you're saying you won't save me..."

If he can't depend on others, then he will just put an end to this miserable existence himself—

Seeing Subaru's breath pause with this resolve, Beatrice let slip a small sound.

Beatrice: "Ah."

And, as her voice entered his ears, without hesitation, Subaru stuck out his tongue, and,

Subaru: "———!"

Biting down with all his force, he committed to this suicidal act.

Excruciating pain. Pain of an entirely different magnitude from the pain of his right arm. No matter how much he experiences it, he can never develop tolerance to this. No matter how the injury was incurred, no matter which part of his body it came from, it was always new, excruciating, intolerable pain that he could never grow used to. Regardless of where or when, all pain is equal in that sense.

Blood pouring from his mouth, Subaru turned up the whites of his eyes and fainted on the spot.

Falling over, his eyes swam as his limbs began to spasm. Agonizing pain. Unable to breathe. His near-severed tongue lodged itself in his throat, suffocating him from within.

Beatrice: "—What're you doing!?"

It was not the kind of injury that resulted in immediate death. The acute, dull pain pulsed, shocking his brain in fits. His limbs shook uncontrollably as streams of bloody tears ran across his cheeks, conveying his unbearable agony. The half-severed tip of his tongue dangled from the edge of his lips, indicative of Subaru's insufficient resolve at the final moment of his act to end his life.

Since coming to this parallel world, this was the third time that Subaru had chosen to commit suicide.

The first was during the loop in the mansion, when he killed himself with the resolve to bring back what was irretrievable.

The second was at the end of the loop that began within the Capital, where he killed himself when he realized that Rem's existence had been wiped from this world. He had stabbed a knife into his throat, but nothing was changed.

And the third time he killed himself— Although he had no guarantee that he would be able to return, he simply could no longer endure living on in this world. It was too heavy, and too unreasonable a burden. And so, staking everything on this slightest hope, in order to retrieve what he had lost—

Beatrice: "...No... Don't leave me all alone..."

A trembling voice called to him from the world that was growing distant.

The voice grew further, and further, until it disappeared entirely—

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—When he woke, the first thing that struck Subaru's nostrils was the scent of dust.

Subaru: "Huh...?"

Waiting for his consciousness to catch up, turning his neck with his eyes still closed, Subaru realized that he had awoken.

Lying sideways on the ground, feeling the coldness of the surface seeping into his body, it went without saying that the restart point was still inside the Tomb.

Then, sitting his body up, he opened his eyes to look over his dark surroundings. His vision, obscured by tears, was still unreliable so soon after waking, and could not make out what he was searching for.

Nevertheless, he was relieved to have returned from death once more. If the place he returned to was the Tomb, then the restart point hadn't changed.

Inside the Tomb, the time would be immediately after Subaru passed the First Trial. Emilia would be collapsed at his side, and he should start by waking her up.

Subaru: “Head, hurts...”

Rubbing himself between the brows, lightly shaking his head, Subaru’s mind worked to organize his current circumstances.

There were already countless things for him to consider without the events of the previous loop added on top. Still, he hadn’t found a single solution. Even the light he was supposed to have seen now felt like a moth lamp luring him into another trap.

As though circumventing one pitfall had only led him to another.

Subaru: “It’s like that free gift you get from that shady fellow on Kenzan¹⁰⁵...”

“Deadly” would be an appropriate description here.

The Sanctuary and the Trials. His relationship with Garfiel. The attack on the mansion. The inexplicable disappearance of the grace period, his vengeance against Elsa— and how to save Rem and the others.

They were all problems that would turn his brain to mush, but he was already fortunate enough to have been granted the chance to continue worrying over them.

Otherwise, it could have all ended there, and he was not entirely without some sense of resignation to that possibility. But as long as that much can be overcome, he will be able to save everything—

Subaru: “It’ll be painful to have to pretend not knowing anything in front of Emilia again, but—”

Mumbling this, Subaru felt his hazy vision beginning to clear. Snorting the dust out of his nose, he decided he should first look for Emilia. With that thought, he lifted his right hand to his forehead like a visor, when he finally noticed it.

—His right hand was missing three of its fingers.

Subaru: “N—!? Aah!?”

¹⁰⁵ Kenzan, or Tsurugisan is a limited express train service in Japan that receives its name from Mount Tsurugi, a mountain in the vicinity of its trail.

Seeing the wound that should not be there, the scars that could not possibly be carried over, Subaru's throat groaned in shock. Struck by the fact that he had taken a far too optimistic view of the world, he cast his trembling eyes over his surroundings.

Cold floor, dry stone walls. The smell of mold. The space that Subaru had hoped for was the Tomb. But the reality in front of his eyes was a corner of the Library lined with packed-full bookshelves, a room drifting with the unique fragrance of vellum enduring the passage of time,

Subaru: "The Forbidden Library... How..."

Inexplicably, his physical body was still in the place he should already have bid farewell to. His thoughts turning to the worst, Subaru began checking over his body.

The worst possibility— was that the moment he set foot into the Forbidden Library, the checkpoint of the world had been set.

Unable to hide his consternation, Subaru stared at the right arm he was holding up to his face. Three fingers were missing, and a third of its width was lost. However, the wounds of the arm had already been sealed, and the contorted, discolored flesh was in the process of regeneration.

His waist and right shoulder that had been pierced by darts showed no apparent injuries, and there was only an intermittent sense of discomfort and a strained sensation on his skin.

At the very least, this could not have been the moment he stepped into the Forbidden Library. Then, by the process of elimination, there could only be one possibility.

Beatrice: "—You're finally awake, I suppose."

For Subaru, who had realized that fact, this was the voice he least wanted to hear.

That careless attitude, that bored-with-the-world intonation, obviously worried but trying her hardest to suppress it, that voice in soprano that was deep down desiring some connection.

Without moving from his seat on the floor, Subaru turned his head.

Even now, he did not abandon the faint hope that he would see the silver-haired girl behind him. But instead, shattering that fantasy, was a young girl in a dress, seated on a wooden stepladder.

Appearing no different than before he lost consciousness, it was Beatrice, looking down at Subaru, holding a book in her hands.

Seeing an inadvertent sigh leaking from Subaru's mouth, she slammed her book shut, and slowly stepped down from her stepladder,

Beatrice: "All because of your stupid actions, I had to really struggle, you know. The injuries on your arm, shoulder, hip, and tongue should all be healed now. There shouldn't be any discomfort."

Subaru: "..."

Beatrice: "You just picked up your life and you have nothing to say, I suppose? Well, hopefully this taught you a lesson to not do anything stupid anymore..."

Subaru: "You... Do you have any idea what you've done?"

Beatrice: "W...?"

Saying these as if asking to be thanked, Beatrice approached the silent Subaru only to be met by these wrenched out words. And, the moment her face frowned up,

Subaru: "-----!"

Subaru suddenly stood up from the ground, and, shooting out his left arm, he grabbed Beatrice by her extravagant dress. Her mouth opened in surprise as he pulled her close, bringing her face up against his,

Beatrice: "Ah—"

Subaru: "—WHO THE HELL ASKED YOU TO SAVE ME!?!?!?"

Beatrice: "-----A..."

Subaru: "Do you realize what you've done!? Because of you, it was all for nothing! Everything, everything that I could have fixed is put at risk because of you! Why didn't you just let me die!? I'm still alive, but what good is that... What good is that!? What!?!?"

By acting without regard for his life, Subaru should have earned the right to start over.

But he was held back by the girl in front of him, and his wish was not granted. And all that remained to Subaru now was an indescribable sense of loss and endless rage directed towards Beatrice.

Subaru: "Saving me on a whim, healing my injuries... Are you satisfied now? You want me to thank you? Ah, yeah, thank you! Thank you for saving my life! Even though everything else is already lost, at least my life's been saved!!"

Beatrice: "B-Betty was only... Only..."

Subaru: "You came for me at the very last moment, how can I thank you enough!? Of course, as usual, there you are looking down on me with that carefree expression like there's not a hurry in the world. You're good at it, aren't you? You like that, don't you? Looking down and sneering at the little human beings and— Ah."

Reaching the extreme limits of hatred, his face contorted with a grotesque smile, Subaru pulled Beatrice close and showered these insults upon her. With this heartless act, he tried to bury all his dejection, disappointment and loss. And yet, his words abruptly ended—

Beatrice: "—Kh."

Subaru: "Ah..."

—When he saw large droplets of tears falling from the eyes of the girl he was holding up-close.

Seeing them, the blood that was rushing to his head instantly fell, and the ugly vindictiveness he had just let slip now became more terrifying than he could bear.

With the unraveling of his spite, his fingers loosened from Beatrice's body. Suddenly freed from his grasp, the young girl's body leaned backwards into the bookshelf behind her and dropped to her knees.

A fierce nausea rose up in his chest. Becoming aware of what he had just done, he could not stand the hideousness of his own heart.

Ugly. Twisted. What was it except lashing out? To Beatrice, who knew nothing about his Return by Death, she was merely healing his wounds when he was on the verge of death. Instead of thanking the person who had saved his life, he had abused her for no reason at all.

He understood this logically. But his emotions did not accept it. Tossed around from within by the two polar extremes of his heart, searching for something to say, he lifted his eyes towards the fallen Beatrice,

Subaru: “No... I-I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to... It wasn’t... your fault...”

If it was anyone’s fault, it was undoubtedly Subaru’s.

Knowing what would happen, without doing anything to guard against it, he had walked directly into the tiger’s den and stepped on its tail. Once again, it was those around him who paid the price. And now, to blame everyone but himself— was beyond the limits of pride.

Emotionally, he wanted to blame everything on this uninformed girl. And he still couldn’t swallow his emotions of the fact that she had hidden herself from him only to show up in that instant.

Nevertheless, they could do nothing to pardon him for the reproaches he shouted at that girl.

Subaru: “I’m sorry. My wounds... Thank you for healing them. But now, I must...”

At least, he should go somewhere away from her, and choose a different place to kill himself.

There was no longer any reason for Subaru to continue on in this world. Too much had been lost. And Subaru was not strong enough to live in a world without what he couldn’t bear to lose.

So, with these concise words of gratitude, Subaru averted his eyes and prepared to leave the Forbidden Library—

Subaru: “———”

—When he noticed, dropped at the collapsed Beatrice’s side, there was a tome bound all in black.

Plain cover. Thick structure. It was the size of a large dictionary and appeared heavy enough to be unwieldy. In any case, there was a certain familiarity that Subaru could not pull his eyes away from.

Why here, why is it here now?

Subaru: “The Gospel... is in the dragon carriage... It shouldn’t... be here in the Library...”

The Witch Cult's Gospel that once belonged to Petelgeuse, taken from him after his death, was now in Subaru's possession. But, having decided that it was not a book that belonged in a Library, he had kept it himself while taking extreme cautions of the unknown functions it may have served. So how could it be here?

Shaking his head at the incomprehensible situation, Subaru reached out his hand to the Gospel that had dropped on the floor, hoping that checking its contents would dispel this unease. But,

Beatrice: "—No!"

Before Subaru's hand could reach it, the Gospel was snatched away.

Messing up the hems of her dress, with panting breaths, Beatrice clasped the Gospel in her arms as she backed away from Subaru. Keeping distance between them, holding back her sobs, she looked down towards the Gospel in her arms, and appeared to breathe a sigh of relief as she traced her fingers over its covers.

Seeing that gesture as though she was caressing something dear, an ominous dread crept up in Subaru's heart,

Subaru: "Why are you... treating that thing like it's something important to you?"

Beatrice: "...."

Subaru: "That's the book those Witch Cultists have... isn't it? It isn't, is it? It just looks really similar, but they're completely different things, right? You just didn't want me to misunderstand, and that's why you backed away from me, right? Yeah, I know I have a bad habit of jumping to conclusions, and I can get really stubborn when ideas get stuck in my head, and I said mean things to you and my eyes are scary-looking and my personality is all twisted but..."

Beatrice: "..."

Subaru: "Hey— Why aren't you denying it?"

While Subaru rambled on and on, trying to make excuses on her behalf, Beatrice only kept her silence. Until, he could only beg.



Illustration from Volume 11, coloring by Floating ([source](#))

Seeing him this way, Beatrice let slip a small sigh, and held out the book in her hands so that Subaru could see it,

Beatrice: "It's exactly as you imagined... This is a Gospel. As you said, it is the same as the ones in the Witch Cultists' possession. The guide to happiness. The foundation of life. And the only, singular truth, I suppose."

Subaru: "W—why... do you have it? Do they sell it somewhere? An *e-e-engimono*¹⁰⁶ that tells your future or something? Some kind of real-life strategy guide that totally breaks the *kyougi no honsoku*¹⁰⁷ or... Ahh, come on."

Beatrice: "—Betty... hasn't been instructed to answer that question, I suppose."

To Subaru's trembling voice, Beatrice flipped quickly through the pages and gave him this cold reply. Seeing the girl's eyes focused on the contents of her book, Subaru felt a numbness encroaching on his tongue,

Subaru: "You won't do anything... unless the book tells you to?"

Beatrice: "That question was not written in the book."

Subaru: "What about healing my wounds? And sheltering me in the Forbidden Library when I was going to be killed?"

Beatrice: "Those questions were not written in the book, I suppose."

Subaru: "And what about talking with me just now? And saving me... when I was trying to die...?"

Beatrice: "—I don't know."

Casting down her eyes, Beatrice only returned this emotionless reply.

¹⁰⁶ English flip. Means "lucky charm" (縁起物), originally "ラッキーアイテム" (good-luck charm/lucky item).

¹⁰⁷ English flip. Means "rules of the game" (競技の本則), originally "ゲームバランス" (game balance).

To see her like a doll, devoid of all emotions, Subaru's lungs convulsed in horror. With light flickering in his eyes such that he forgot how to breathe, he shouted at the top of his voice,

Subaru: "So you can't do a single thing unless the book tells you so!?!?!?"

Beatrice: "...Yes, I suppose. That is so. Everything of everything is in accordance with the Gospel's guidance. That is the meaning of Betty's life, and the purpose for which Betty exists."

Subaru: "So... helping me was just written in that book as well!? Saving me when I was dying from the Witchbeasts in the forest! And saving me when my heart was worn to its core! Our jokes, our arguments, all that time we had fun playing around like idiots... None of it was your free will... IS THAT WHAT YOU'RE TELLING ME?!"

Beatrice: "That's... That's what I'm trying to tell you, I suppose!!!"

Covering over the last part of Subaru's scathing words, Beatrice shouted back, her face flushing in anger. Taking one step forward, she pointed a single finger at Subaru,

Beatrice: "Everything that Betty has done, and seen, and said up to now is written in here, I suppose. You... Something like you will never move Betty's heart. There should be a limit to your arrogance I suppose, human."

Subaru: "———"

Beatrice: "Betty will do what is expected of Betty, and fulfill the meaning of my existence. This life, this span of time, and all that I have sacrificed is for this purpose... and I will not deny it for the likes of you...!!"

Subaru: "Bea..."

Emotions flooded from Beatrice like a broken dam. And although he tried to speak in that instant, he was silenced by an abrupt, overwhelming pressure from the front.

Feeling the sensation of being forced back by a wind, unable to resist, Subaru realized that his body was being pushed towards the door— And, just like that, he was flung off his feet.

Subaru: "Sto... Beatrice!"

Beatrice: "Betty's everything is for Mother! And Mother is the only one Betty needs! I don't care about you... I don't care..."

Subaru: "-----"

Beatrice: "I don't care. I hate you. I hate you. —I hate you!!!"

Shaking her head and hiding the tears streaming down her cheeks, the girl screamed to Subaru as he was flung through the air.

The door opened. The space of the Forbidden Library was driving Subaru out. Before he passed through the door, he clasped onto the doorframe with his right hand. But, with fewer than three fingers, it was not nearly enough. Only his index finger held on, but even that only gave him a few seconds of respite.

Lifting his face, Subaru tried to shout to the crying girl—

Subaru: "Beatri—!"

Beatrice: "...u-sama.¹⁰⁸"

Drowned out by her quiet voice, Subaru's call did not reach her.

Blown away. Wiped out. Space distorted as Subaru's physical body was expelled into a place that shouldn't exist.

Beatrice: "-----"

The door thundered shut, the gushing wind halted with the sound, and silence descended on the Library once more.

The girl who was left alone, with an expression as if holding back her sobs, slowly walked into the depths of the room— stepping onto her usual stepladder and quietly sitting down, she hugged her knees and opened the Gospel with her trembling fingertips. Then,

¹⁰⁸ Translation note by TranslationChicken: "The «u» sound could be several different letters in English. It could be any Japanese name ending in L, «ru», or ending in S, CE or X, «su». There is also the possibility of it standing for «*tou-sama*», meaning father, matching «*okaa-sama*», Beatrice's word for mother".

Beatrice: "Why... couldn't Betty... ever..."

In front of the wordless, blank pages, only her sobs resounded pointlessly throughout the silence of the room.

Arc 4 Chapter 36 - At the End of Confusion

Has been cut from the Light Novel Adaptation

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

—The moment he was ejected from the door, Subaru felt a sense of weightlessness as though the sky and the earth had been reversed.

Subaru: “—Oooguaah!?”

The pain of his back striking the solid ground wrenched out all the air from his lungs and left his throat gasping for breath. Carried on by the momentum, he went tumbling across the floor and was only stopped by smashing into a wall. Shaking his head to cast off the ejected sensation, still dazzled from the pain, Subaru lifted his face and opened his eyes.

Subaru: “Beatrice... Ugh.”

Giving voice to the name of the girl whose name he failed to call at their parting, it was already too late for it to reach her.

The moment Door Crossing was activated, an insurmountable gap had been opened between them. Her rejection was so fierce and deep that Subaru’s voice could no longer touch her.

Subaru: “Why do I... always...!”

Was there really no way for him to realize his own mistakes except by failing and picking the worst possible choice?

All he wanted was to take the optimal actions leading to the best possible future, but why was he always too weak, foolish and insufficient?

Subaru: “What are you doing with a Gospel... Just, what’s with you...!?”

The existence of the black-bound book in her hands—— the Gospel decisively opened a distance between them.

Until this point, Subaru had been convinced that despite the short amount of time he and Beatrice had spent together, there was certainly something that existed between them.

Even though they were always taunting each other, expressing their mutual displeasure at seeing each other, Subaru nonetheless believed that as long as there was that something, things could never come to an end between them.

But that was only presumption. Conceit. Misaligned understanding in the extreme.

Subaru’s conviction was nothing more than the product of his self-satisfaction, and Beatrice never held any sentiments towards him except the literal meanings of her words. She was merely following the Gospel’s orders and was only putting up with Subaru in order to fulfill her purpose. All the while, in her heart, she was indifferent, or even despised him.

Subaru: “...Is that really how it is?”

The bond he thought was there was declared to be non-existent, and his attempts to deny it were cut off by Beatrice’s angered cries.

As Subaru imagined, their connection was confirmed to be counterfeit. She had never been moved in the slightest by Subaru’s existence, and there was only ever the sense of necessity behind her actions.

Subaru: “All those times you smiled, got mad, or protected me... Were they all just some lies written in a script...?”

How is that possible, Subaru’s brittle heart still denied it. In that final moment, Beatrice’s tearful voice at their parting had drawn a mist over the veracity of her words.

No matter what, it was still too early for him to come to that conclusion.

Subaru: “Who cares if it’s written inside some book, all I remember is that you saved me... Nothing can change that fact. It’s a debt that only I remember.”

In the loops beginning in the mansion, more than once, Subaru had been saved by Beatrice.

There were all those times when he loitered in the Forbidden Library to gather his thoughts after Return by Death, and when she more literally saved his life when he was littered with the Witchbeasts' curses. And, in that lost world where he had allowed Rem to die, when he was hounded by Ram and Roswaal, she went so far as to twist the meaning of their off-hand verbal Contract in order to protect him.

Even if that great debt no longer existed anywhere in this world, it still remained within Subaru's heart.

Subaru: "That time... I was glad."

Even when he was convinced that there was no one left on his side, she saved him, nonetheless.

When he thought Rem and Ram were his enemies, when he couldn't fathom Roswaal's intentions, and when he was worn to his core when even Emilia couldn't completely trust him, Beatrice alone had saved him.

Just how much that temporary, transient Contract had saved him was beyond what words could convey, and a kindness he could never fully repay.

Subaru: "I'll repay that debt. I still don't know whether you loaned it to me of your own free will, or if you were following that book's wishes... but I'll find out."

Obviously, he could no longer ask her now after she had so firmly rejected him. So, since Subaru's resolve no longer held any meaning in this world, it will just have to be carried over to the next one.

He held up his right arm. Hand missing three of its fingers. Shoulder and hip twinging. Head banged up. And tongue slightly shortened. Every single last one dealt him pain impossible to forget.

He saw Rem beneath his closed eyelids. And Petra. And Frederica. And Beatrice, with her back turned to him. And, at last, there was Emilia.

—Everything that Subaru had failed to grasp because of his mistakes in this world.

In order to retrieve what was lost, he will commit himself to do what he must. To continue what Beatrice had interrupted, and once again dive into that spiral,

Subaru: “———”

Subaru held out his shortened tongue and gathered the resolve to bite into it once more.

But, just the thought of his botched suicide resurrected his anguish and seized him with fear once more. Hesitation surfaced, and his legs began to tremble. Word games like resolve are worthless when faced with the end.

Holding back such counterproductive emotions, overcoming the unsurpassable dread of impending death and praying to be returned to a time when he could still fix everything, Subaru shut his eyes for the final moment——

Subaru: “...Where... is this place?”

He realized that the room where Door Crossing had dumped him was a place he had never seen before.

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To Subaru, this was an unknown space completely different from the familiar Roswaal mansion.

Damp stone slabs, and grimy walls covered in sprawling ivy. Randomly arranged tables with rusted metal tools scattered over them that evoked unease by sight. And above all,

Subaru: “Uu—!?”

A dense, putrid stench, which, once noticed, could no longer be severed from his mind.

It was different from the rotten stench of organic waste, but there was no other way to describe it but as a horrid rotting stench that injected him with the urge to vomit. Quickly covering his mouth, Subaru’s empty stomach retched out all its fluids.

Seeing the yellow stomach bile splashing onto the floor, panting, Subaru glared through his surroundings. The more he looked, the stranger the unknown space appeared.

A dark room covered by stone slabs, its space about twice the area of the drawing room in Roswaal's mansion. It wasn't large enough to be considered airy, but it couldn't be called cramped either.

Strewn about one corner of the room were tables with mysterious instruments scattered on top, and opposite the tables— littering the vast majority of the room, were,

Subaru: "Broken tables and... crystals...? Crystals or, fragments of magic crystals? And then this hole..."

Looking at the ground before him, there were carcasses of broken tables and deactivated magic crystals scattered across the floor, and even further ahead, was a wide, gaping hole about four meters in diameter. In the absence of adequate lighting, it was all the more impossible to gauge the true depth of the pitfall.

If he turned up his head, he would see pale blue light emanating from glowing moss on the walls. Like the ones growing freely in the forests, they absorb mana from the atmosphere to fuel their light. The forests surrounding the mansion were spared from absolute darkness by the light of this very kind of moss, along with the light of the stars.

Feeling his way across the floor with the aid of moss-light, enduring the unpleasant sensation of moisture soaking into his pants and the slime sticking to his palms, he peeked into the depths of the hole.

A quiet, cold wind swept up from below, carrying a nose-turning— Or rather, nose-demolishing stench along with it.

Subaru: "Uu... pugh. Not having the courage to look inside would've been the correct choice, huh... What is that smell?"

If it had been a stench characteristic of something harboring life, then Subaru's imagination might have turned to the worst. But this rising stench was something different from that of rotting flesh, and closer to a strong chemical smell.

Like the sensation of sniffing some stringent medicine, a painful shock jolted his nose. The stench rising from the dark bottom of this pit was wholly unlike the scent of any living organism.

Subaru: "—Something else."

Both physically and mentally unwilling to check the bottom of the pit again, Subaru wiped off his nose and consciously breathed through his mouth as he looked around the room.

The first thing his eyes landed on were the scattered carcasses of tables and expended magic crystals. The metal tables seemed to have been crushed by some tremendous impact, and the magic crystals appeared to have been stacked on the tables before that. Slowly flipping over one of the mangled tables, he noticed some sort of pattern engraved on its surface.

Subaru: “Looks like... some kind of magic circle...”

Magic circles like this show up quite a lot in alternate world fantasy genres, but Subaru couldn’t recall seeing anything similar since coming to this world. Basically, the magic in this world passes through living bodies to interfere with the outside world, and aside from magic lamps and magical devices, Subaru had yet to find any exceptions. So he was quite surprised to find a magic circle here, but,

Subaru: “Actually, does it even do anything? If it does, then... why would they leave the circle in a place like this...”

Could it be that the magic couldn’t be activated here directly, and was instead meant to serve some remote functionality? Or perhaps it was some kind of system to run the spell continuously without the caster being present?

Subaru: “If that was the case, it’d explain why there’re so many used up magic crystals next to it.”

After the magic crystals serving as its energy source were depleted, the magic circle lost its power—that would be the most plausible explanation. But, despite reaching this conclusion, what Subaru still did not understand was the true purpose of the hole and the broken tables. Nor could he completely rule out the possibility that the room had been purposely designed to explode in the event that the spell was interrupted. Regardless,

Subaru: “In the end... I still have no idea where I am.”

A dark hole seemingly going down forever. A magic circle used for some kind of spell, surrounded by magic crystals. Looking over the rotting, putrid room, he saw another tipped-over table in the corner—and picked up one of the rusted metal tools beside it.

Resembling a plier or nipper, it was the kind of utensil one might use when crafting plastic models. It was covered in the same slime that was smeared across the floor, and, more importantly, perhaps due to the passage of time in which it had spent in disuse, it disintegrated into dust at the touch of Subaru's hand.

Not only the tools, but the table was in the same condition. After years upon years of exposure, its bent legs had deteriorated to the brink of dust, and when he nudged it with his foot with the slightest force, it lost its shape and transformed into powdered iron.

There was no other information to be gained beyond that. But if there was just one point he could not get out of his mind, it would be,

Subaru: "The way this was destroyed, and its timing, was drastically different from the table in front of the hole..."

Unlike the one which had become brittle from the passage of time before welcoming its collapse, the table beside the hole was obviously crushed by some destructive force. And, judging from the state of the ground beneath it, its destruction came extremely recently— probably within the last few days.

Subaru: "A room destroyed... by whom, and why..."

Muttering this question, Subaru suddenly realized that his thinking was somewhat ridiculous.

What was the point of asking this? It was not the kind of question that could be answered by thinking alone, and more importantly, the problems that Subaru had to deal with were already more than his arms could hold.

He mustn't allow himself to be weighed down by small matters in between the large, which would only serve to hasten his collapse. Above all, the very act of distracting his attention away was nothing more than desperately dragging out the unbearable agony of the time before his impending suicide.

But, even recognizing this unopposable sense of shame, Subaru could not pull himself away from the strangeness of this room. At this point, there was something very important right in front of him—

Subaru: "-----"

Guided by an inexplicable certainty, Subaru felt his way forward, turning his head about, searching for the room's exit. Since he was brought here by Door Crossing, this room must have a closeable door that tossed him out.

At last, Subaru found the door that had so rudely dropped him off— a small flap installed on the upper part of the wall, perhaps used for ventilation or the likes.

Other than that, he could see nothing else that could be considered an exit. The official door might be on the other side of the collapsed pit— in the opposite, unreachable end of the room.

When this fact finally sank in, Subaru had to give up on the notion of leaving in any conventional way. Wiping off the sweat and the unknown slime stuck to his palms onto his pants, he held his breath as he reached his fingers towards the flap.

The flap was at a height he had to stretch up on his tiptoes to reach, and its size would be closest to a garbage disposal chute. Although it wasn't too narrow for a person to pass through, it wasn't so luxurious that Subaru could fit through easily.

After some struggling owing to his maimed right hand, the rusted flap creaked open, and the effort to maneuver his body into the narrow tunnel began. The tunnel was the width of a ventilation pipe. In the worst case, he imagined it'd be a paradise for insect and rats, but it turned out to be surprisingly clean—or, not exactly, but at least the fact that the dusty passage was free of living critters was a saving grace.

It took about three minutes before he passed through the tunnel. He got used to the crawling about halfway through, and just as his movements started getting smooth, he found himself at the finishing line. Popping out in the room connected by the ventilation tunnel, Subaru jumped down in the same manner, and started looking over his surroundings. He took the greatest caution to make sure there wasn't another pit here, but,

Subaru: "It's got a different vibe from the previous one. Compared to the one that looked like a lab this one's more like a waiting room."

Only about a half of a half of the size of the previous room, it appeared to be a room whose sole purpose was to be passed through. Other than two walk-through-on-the-ground type of doors, there was nothing else in the room. Certainly, it was a division that looked very much like a waiting room.

It'd be perfect if there was a coffee table with some magazines stacked on it—

Subaru: “Judging by the direction I came from, the other side of this door would be... Yeah.”

Turning the knob and pushing open the door, he was greeted by the collapsed pit in front of his eyes. Seeing this death-trap situation, Subaru spilled a small sigh and closed the door again for the sake of his mental health— And, smelling the putrid stench seeping into this room, he kicked himself for not being quicker with his decision.

Then, quietly turning around, this time he faced the opposite door. Behind that door, would be a space completely unknown to Subaru—

Subaru: “...Ugh.”

The sweat on his palm that was supposed to have been wiped off and the cold sweat dripping down his back became unbearable. Since he didn't know what was beyond that door, he could only imagine and prepare for the worst.

Subaru: “If... this is inside the mansion, then...”

Although it could just be another room he had never seen before, it was also possible that the moment he opened this door, he would find Elsa on the other side. If he did come face to face with that murderer, Subaru was not so confident that he'd be able to stay calm.

Even the impulse of “you need to die immediately” insisting on his suicide, could not help but transform into teeth-shattering hatred at that reminder.

Just the thought that the deviant whose blade killed Petra, Frederica— and Rem, might be there tormented Subaru's mind with rage surging to a boil. Like a curse, a part of him wished that she was there, while a pathetic craving for life hoped that she was not. Wavering between the two extremes, Subaru's mouth contorted into a wicked grin,

Subaru: “———”

Whether she's there, or not there, this deranged emotion would not be betrayed.

At the end of his thoughts' departure from sanity, faced with the world that opened before him,

Subaru: “———Ah.”

Witnessing a sight that should not be there, Subaru lost himself in that moment.

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——Subaru’s mind had actually already reached an answer about where this unfamiliar space was.

In the first place, there was barely a single room in Roswaal’s mansion where Subaru hadn’t set foot in, and he even had free access to the Forbidden Library in a sense— so all that was left was the door which he had only touched twice, but never got to see the other side of. That is, the door inside the Escape Passage.

The first time, he was hindered by a Spirit with gray fur, and the second time, he was chased away by a murdering maniac. So Subaru was never able to pass beyond that point.

And that was why, despite harboring a certain sense of distrust towards whatever was waiting beyond this room, he did not have any doubts that it would be a part of Roswaal’s mansion, but,

Subaru: “Where is... this?”

Stumped, he muttered this question stupidly at no one in particular.

Beyond the opened door, what panned out directly in front of Subaru was a cold, dark underground passage— Or not. Rather, it was a luscious green forest in the midst of vibrant nature, and what was even stranger, was that,

Subaru: “It’s, morning...?”

Gazing up towards the sky through the gaps between the trees, he saw the rising sun. Seeing the height of the sun, and the sensation of the morning wind blowing against his skin, Subaru’s mind was further racked by doubt.

By the time Subaru returned to the mansion, it was already right before dusk. Counting the time spent in his conversation with Frederica, along with Elsa's attack, Subaru would have been wounded just before midnight—which would mean that, at this point, half a day had already passed.

Subaru: "While I was unconscious...!?"

As soon as he bit down on his tongue to commit suicide, Subaru fell unconscious. When he woke again, his wounds had been healed and he was so preoccupied with his failure to kill himself that he had forgotten to consider how much time had passed. Just how long had Subaru spent unconscious in the Library?

He remembered Beatrice calling it "a place detached from the passage of time". And while Subaru wasn't sure just how literal that was meant to be,

Subaru: "If the save-point gets overwritten because of this...!"

That would be an unthinkable situation.

Before his worst fear comes to pass and the state of reality is overwritten, he must immediately end his own life. And yet, another feeling was asserting its existence in direct conflict with this anxiety. That feeling was screaming—

—You must find out where this place is.

He didn't know what would be the purpose of doing so. Considering all that had happened so far, and the malicious nature of Return by Death, he knew he should kill himself now.

But there was a horrifying calmness within Subaru that insisted this, despite fully understanding the circumstances he found himself in.

Subaru: "—Kh, damnit!"

Kicking his foot into the ground and sending spit flying, Subaru sprinted into the forest ahead of him. Dashing through the gaps between the trees, his conversation with Petra in the escape tunnel surfaced in his mind.

The escape passage leads deep into the mountains behind the mansion to a small cabin, where one might pick up emergency supplies and the like.

If that information can be relied on, then this should be that cabin in the mountains just now, and he would be running through the back mountains which he had already trekked though so many times before. But,

Subaru: “Was that the cabin? Where were the supply bags? And, in the first place... Looking like it’s been abandoned for ages, what kind of disaster relief infrastructure is that... !?”

That strange place that Subaru saw contained more than enough evidence to support his sense of foreboding. There were too few similarities that actually matched Petra’s description. More importantly, if Frederica and Rem had been periodically maintaining it, there would be no explanation for the horrendous state of disrepair. This was something Subaru could say with confidence, knowing the work ethics of those two maids.

Passing through the forest, there was now another question, which would be the lack of a slope. The cabin was supposed to be in the mountains, but was it built somewhere without the slightest change in elevation for a hundred meters or more? Losing track of where he was, Subaru was racked by frustration for failing to see what he was trying to see.

Then, when his frustration and doubt had reached their limits, they were quickly and unexpectedly shattered.

Where the trees opened up, suddenly clearing his line of sight, Subaru skidded to a stop. The pavement, if it could still be called pavement in spite of the ragged condition it was in, was evidence that there were people frequently passing through here. And, more importantly, the rows of houses visible in the distance further indicated that there were people living on this land.

Taking this into his eyes, Subaru’s thoughts were taken hostage by shock in the truest sense of the phrase. Because the scenery he saw was—

Subaru: “The, S-Sanctuary!?”

The place he had bid farewell to only half a day ago, and which by his estimation would require a whole day to return to.

He lifted his right hand in accordance with his horror. His fingers were still missing. Lost. Return by Death had not been activated. And yet, he was now standing in a place he did not belong.

Subaru: “Why... am I here? Was it... Door Crossing...?”

There could be no other answer.

After being kicked out of the mansion’s Forbidden Library by Beatrice, Subaru had been sent to a corner of the Sanctuary through Door Crossing. But how did this happen?

Subaru: “Is distance... irrelevant? Yes, that one time I got transported from the mansion to an animal stall in the village, but...”¹⁰⁹”

Thinking in terms of distance, even that was still within permissible range. But considering the distance from the mansion to the Sanctuary, this kind of long-distance transportation was, to put it simply, beyond imagination and common sense.

Yet, considering the overabundance of supernatural powers he had witnessed so far, Subaru didn’t have much choice except to scratch his head and swallow it down.

Subaru: “Screw it! If I’m back in the Sanctuary then... Roswaal!!”

Sprint forth to that clown’s location and make him spit out every single one of his intentions.

Roswaal had always treated Beatrice cordially at the mansion. That sorcerer must certainly know her origins and how she came to possess a Gospel.

If he knows, yet tries to toy with the ignorant Subaru, that will be fine as well. Even if he has to punch his nose in, burn him, rip him apart, and bite out his throat, he’d do it until that clown spills everything.

Subaru: “———!”

¹⁰⁹ Happened in WN Arc 3 Chapter 72, as a consequence of the events in the Fragment of WN Arc 3 Chapter 71 included in the previous volume. Likewise, it was cut from Light Novel Volume 8.

At this moment, completely forgetting the need to kill himself, Subaru started to run. His thoughts dyed red with the pure color of rage, he dashed to the edge of the forest, to the residence where Roswaal would be sleeping.

Transforming into an incarnation of wrath, Subaru sped through the Sanctuary, forgetting his exhaustion and agony, drawn only towards his destination.

Kicking the door open with the same momentum, Subaru pushed into the house, baring his teeth,

Subaru: “Roswaal!! Show your face!! There’s a mountain of things I wanna ask you!!!”

Plunging forward violently in a way that would normally earn him a scolding from a maid, Subaru barked out his demands. Hearing no reply coming from the room, Subaru stomped forward with deafening steps and wrung the final door open,

Subaru: “No more playing dumb and no more lies. Start spilling everything you’ve been hiding and...”

As he was about to go on, Subaru’s voice trailed off.

Because, not only was the target of his condensed dissatisfaction absent, there was no one in the room to listen.

Gone. This fact only sent more boiling rage churning through Subaru’s mind. Kicking the bed as hard as he could, the pain on his toes only escalated his anger further as he stormed out of the house.

In that case, Roswaal must be at Ryuzu’s house— meeting with Emilia, or perhaps discussing something with Ryuzu and Garfiel. Either way, becoming so active the moment Subaru was out of the picture, he certainly had the audacity. His timing to get up and running was so perfect, one might even suspect whether he had been faking it all this time.

As soon as suspicion was set on its course, negativity spiraled without interruption. With this completely dominating his thoughts, Subaru glared with sharpened eyes into the Sanctuary— And, once again, realized too late.

Subaru: “...Ah?”

It was early morning. As far as Subaru knew, that should be when the residents of the Sanctuary would begin preparing breakfast and washing themselves. Now that the refugees were gone, there was no need to cook mass meals, but each of the families would still need to cook.

They should, but there were no signs of such daily activities in sight. Rather, even before that,

Subaru: "It's not just Roswaal... Where did everyone else go?"

Looking left and right, there was not a single person in sight.

Come to think of it, from the moment he left the forest and returned to the Sanctuary, he couldn't recall having run into, or seen anyone on the way.

Even if he considered how there weren't that many residents in the Sanctuary, to not bump into a single person in the dead center of the village was too improbable to ignore.

Subaru: "There's no way..."

Shaking his head and trying to cast aside the nauseating sense of foreboding, Subaru knocked on the door of the nearest residence. He knocked, but confirming that there was no reply, he opened the door and peeked inside— But nobody came.

In this house, there were supposed to be two beast-eared sisters living here.

One after another, Subaru looked inside every recognizable house, and every time his hope was betrayed, his disappointment mounted.

Everyone was missing, and there was no one here. The people of the Sanctuary had simply vanished.

Subaru: "Somebody! Anybody!? Where'd you all go!?"

The nauseating premonition accumulated. He felt an anxiety and an inexplicable sense of loss.

During his showdown with the Witch Cult, the tragic memories of the Arlam Village that welcomed Subaru, who had returned too late, resurfaced— contorted, overlapping corpses, and innumerable faces of death in anguish and despair. Familiar faces drained of color, and Petra who would never move again.

Subaru: “———Aaaaagh!”

With terror coursing up Subaru’s back, the endless unease pushed him into a dash. A sound like a shriek escaped from his throat as he sped towards one singular place.

A one-of-a-kind building at the edge of the Sanctuary, a symbol of respect towards the matriarch of the village, and a place now lent to a single girl for her to place her bed.

Subaru: “——Emilia!!”

Sprinting in while calling the name of the lovely girl, Subaru scanned the room.

A silver-haired girl with sleepy eyes looking back at Subaru, blinking several times with a surprised expression, saying “Good morning, Subaru” with a smile that made his chest ache——

Subaru: “———”

In the place where she should be looking back at him, there was no one at all.

Running over to the bed, he touched his fingers to the disheveled sheets. There was no warmth, and whoever slept here had already left for a considerable amount of time.

Having made sure of this, Subaru dashed out of the house and directed his legs towards the final place he could go. The only place that could grant him an answer to this absurd, unreasonable senselessness.

Subaru: “Hahh... hahh...!”

Out of breath. Tasting blood in the back of his throat, Subaru arrived at the very end of the Sanctuary, at the Tomb in which the Witch of Greed, Echidna, was sleeping.

There was no Garfiel, sitting in the middle of the road, obstructing him. Nor was he in front of the Tomb, waiting for him. Was that a blessing, or would he rather have been blocked just so he could see a familiar face——?

Subaru: “No... How could I even face him...”

As the one who couldn't save his only sister, how could he bring himself to see him as though nothing had happened?

The relief Subaru felt at his absence, despite his unbearable anxiety of being unable to find anyone, and the way he was glossing over his own weakness, was truly grotesque. Shaking his head to cast off such sentiments, Subaru stepped towards the Tomb before anything could interfere.

It was not time to initiate the Trial, but perhaps some action would be taken on the Witch's side. Hoping this, and clinging to this hope, Subaru sought the Witch who might give answers to his questions—

Subaru: "...Kh—huu."

The moment he stepped forward, Subaru received a feeling as though something had passed through his body.

He slowly looked down. Under his chest, and above his lower abdomen, in the dead center of his torso—there was a round, gaping hole the size of a fist.

Subaru: "Fff... Ehh?"

Reaching out his hand, he tried to cover over the hole. A loud noise accompanied the massive volume of blood exploding out from the gap. Despite stuffing his palm over the opening, the hole penetrated all the way through his body and was still open on the back side. Unable to plug both sides at once, and having lost so much blood, his body could not even maintain its current posture and toppled to the ground.

—No, pain. Can't, understand. What, happened?

Death. Dying. Going to die. At least, it's certain that death was coming.

How, why, why here? Elsa? She tracked him this far? The distance between the mansion and the Sanctuary... Beatrice, impossible. Gospel? Her, why? Rem... Who was it? Dying. Scared. What. Who. Emilia. Witch. Witch. Witc—

Subaru: "———Ah."

His vision began to haze. The end was approaching.

His anticipated death came in an unanticipated form. Subaru felt no relief that he was finally dying. Only, just briefly, he was afraid of death.

Even if he claimed to have resolved to die, death came to him in a different way than he had envisioned. His heart was thrown into disarray, his pathetic desire for life screamed, while his soul refused to be peeled away from this world— Yet, death was slowly eroding Subaru,

Subaru: “—So... weak.”

His own powerlessness streaming down his useless cheeks, Subaru’s heart stopped beating.

His long-awaited death having arrived in this unexpected form, his lifeless face contorted in anguish and horror. The wretchedness of this death would be disputed by no one.

???: “———Kch.”

With that sound, he was chewed.

Arc 4 Chapter 37 - Initial Impulse to Kill

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 11, Chapter 3 “Friend”, Part 1-3

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Complete](#)

He heard a sound like the torrent of a rushing stream.

A furious sound of water. A foaming waterfall coursing downwards, pulled along by gravity and current.

Reverberating in his ears, or perhaps within his skull, the thunderous roar rumbled at Subaru’s brain as his consciousness was guided from loss into wakefulness. He saw a light, and—

Subaru: “—Ah, khu.”

Sensing something clogging his throat, the rhythm of Subaru’s breaths grew bewildered as he gagged for air.

Inhale, exhale, the regular intervals between his breaths turned vague. His oxygen-deprived body spasmed and shook, saliva drooled from his mouth as Subaru wrung open his eyes.

Subaru: “Khu, aghk!”

His face was pressed against the ground. Pushing himself off the surface and onto his elbows and knees, Subaru grasped his chest, panting, and tried to calm his aching lungs.

The pain fell away, and he spat out the saliva that had nowhere else to go. With his body settling as oxygen rushed to his brain, he took a breath— And began to remember.

Subaru: “Uuuuaah, AAAAAH!?”

Recalling the gaping hole that had been opened in his chest, he felt the sense of emptiness of all the contents of his body flooding out.

Quickly pressing his palm over his stomach, he confirmed the absence of the gap that was the source of that emptiness, and the tension of his body began to soften.

Tasting a numbing shock through his limbs, Subaru scraped his forehead against the ground as the friction and the abrasive pain affirmed the reality of his existence.

Subaru: "What was, that... at the end..."

Face-down on the ground, blood draining from his body, the sensation of his soul being sucked out from that very same gap certainly existed. But that wasn't the source of the sense of loss eroding at Subaru's flesh. The true horror came afterwards, near the end, among the lingering embers of life being guided into death.

His consciousness was vague, and his memories were blurred, but this alone he remembered clearly.

—Something, something unknown, was devouring him.

Subaru: "C-cut down, beaten to death, frozen, falling to death, I've died all sorts of ways now... B—but this is still the first time I've been ea—eaten in the end..."

Recounting the conscious experience of what happened to his body in the end, Subaru was once more gripped by terror.

The direct cause of death was the loss of blood spilling from the gap, and he had no intentions of making light of death itself, but he had nonetheless experienced first-hand a fragment of the possibility that death was not the end.

Who knew that the sensation of his body being eaten would be accompanied by such intense sense of loss? Subaru had lost fingers and legs before, but this sickening sensation was far beyond all of them—

Subaru: "Fingers...!?"

Coming to that thought, Subaru suddenly wanted to kick himself for being so slow to remember.

Considering the mortal wound he sustained and the unmistakable sensation of death, there was no doubt that Return by Death had been activated. There was no entity in this world that had more profound knowledge of death than Natsuki Subaru. He died, and he returned, that much was certain.

What was not certain, was where on the timeline Subaru returned to.

If his restart point had been moved to an unsalvageable point in time, where would Subaru's resolve and pledges lead him then—

Subaru: "Ah..."

Scanning his bloodshot eyes over his surroundings, Subaru desperately tried to confirm the time and his current location. But what calmed this desperate panic was the sensation on his forehead while his fingers wiped the sweat off his brows— The three missing fingers on his right hand were definitely still there.

Subaru: "Fingers... are still there, which means."

As if to make sure, he held up his right arm and ran his gaze from his fingers to his elbow. Fingers and wrist, all the way to the elbow, nothing was missing, nor were there any signs of scarring. The white scars left over from the disturbance of the Wolgarms were still there, but that's a different story.

Having confirmed that his arm was fine, Subaru moved on to his shoulder and hip— the spots where Elsa's darts had dug into. Sensing no stiffness in his skin, Subaru almost collapsed from sheer relief, finally convinced that he had returned to a time before his encounter with Elsa.

Subaru: "Th... Then, for now..."

It was fortune in midst of misfortune that he wasn't given anything worse than death.

Feeling relieved and drained, Subaru dropped his eyes and thanked his bad luck. And it was then when he turned his gaze to the side, and noticed.

—That in the corner of the dark room, there was Emilia, writhing in pain.

Subaru: "Emili...a."

Instantly rushing over to her side, Subaru realized that they were alone in a dark and musty vault. He had only one experience of being alone with her like this, so there was only one possible explanation. That is,

Subaru: “The restart point... hasn’t changed...!”

Inside the Tomb, directly after passing the Trial—— was where Subaru returned to after death. In exchange for nothing being gained, nothing was lost either. Time to try again.

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——There must be something he could do to fix everything.

Having confirmed where he had returned to, the thought that passed through Subaru’s mind was so positive that it was hard to believe it could have come from a person who had just been trembling in his final moments.

It was now the second night after his arrival in the Sanctuary. With the information gained from the first loop and second loop, Subaru reorganized the circumstances and events in his mind as he set about searching for the solution.

By now, the bloody content was already nothing out of the ordinary. Whether it was the initial cluelessness, or becoming hopelessly stuck with no choice but to hug his own head, it was just the same thing all over again.

Subaru: “Although... the usual methods won’t be working this time.”

No matter what, Subaru still wasn’t able to grasp the full story of this loop. And even against the clear and obvious threats, he couldn’t see any effective countermeasures.

Currently, there was no way to oppose the combat strength of the obvious threat, Elsa. With no exploitable weaknesses, the degree of danger she posed may have surpassed even Petelgeuse.

Countering her attack on the mansion remained the foremost priority. However, it would seem the problems didn’t end there,

Subaru: “Last time, near the end... Why was the Sanctuary empty...?”

He couldn't understand why Beatrice would transport him all the way to the Sanctuary, but the fact that everyone there had vanished was all the more incomprehensible. He recalled running all around, shouting, only to receive no reply in return.

And then, there was the final calamity which befell Subaru when he tried to seek the answers inside the Tomb.

With a hole opened in his chest, Subaru died without the slightest idea of what could have given him that wound. The memory of that still-vivid injury brought back nothing but pain and horror, without a single clue or answer.

Back there, what on earth happened in the Sanctuary? What happened to Subaru? What was Beatrice thinking? And Emilia—

Subaru: "...Impossible."

Coming to that point, suddenly struck by the contradiction between his thoughts and his behavior, Subaru's face stiffened.

It was important to organize the situation. It was also important to set goals for the future and draw up plans to realize them. And it was a priority to collect the scattered information and shape them into something useful for obtaining that longed-for future, but,

Subaru: "——"

Did that give him an excuse to forget Emilia, currently struggling against a nightmare right in front of his eyes?

Subaru: "I-I..."

Emilia was still inside the Trial, tormented by agony. Her body and soul, assaulted by her past, being chipped away by the excruciating pain of the weight of the cross she had to bear.

Long-lasting pain without the slightest consolation at its end.

Subaru knew— How much sorrow this was bringing her, how much it was wearing her down, and how much it was weakening her heart.

It was because he couldn't bear to see her like this that he had resolved to complete the Trial in her place, to clear away all obstacles, and open the way for her to pass.

That was how it should have been, so why was Subaru so relieved to see her suffering?

"Thank god I returned to a point in time where she was suffering". Despite knowing what will become of her pain, he had cruelly put his thoughts before her.

The moment he understood this, Subaru saw the hideous existence he had descended into. Even knowing that the girl in front of his eyes, the person most important to him in this world, was gasping in unbearable agony, he was averting his eyes from her distress, fully absorbed in his self-centered foolishness.

To Subaru, such weakness was abhorrent and grotesque.

Subaru: "Either way..."

There was no time to be tormented by guilt and the contradictions of his heart. He must wake Emilia up right away, and bring her out of this place.

He could take the time to gather his thoughts once they're outside. There was no reason to prolong her suffering. And—

Subaru: "Right now, there's a guy I need to get some answers out of."

It was starting to piss him off how lenient he was before. How is it that all this time, he had allowed the central character at the core of everything to get away with his ambiguities?

The result was the tragedy that befell the mansion, and his incomprehensible death at the Sanctuary. If that was the future that came from Subaru's cowardice, then—

Subaru: "I will do everything differently this time."

As these words rolled off his tongue, Subaru reached out his hand to wake Emilia.

In that moment, not even Subaru himself was aware that his face was being contorted by a fury he could not suppress.

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Subaru: “—Just how much do you know, Roswaal?”

That was the first thing that came out of Subaru’s mouth as he swung open the door. Lying on the bed, Roswaal narrowed his eyes. And Subaru, seeing himself reflected in those mismatched pupils, barged into the room and slammed the door shut behind him in a display of his present emotion.

—After finally calming Emilia and bringing her out of the Tomb, Subaru headed to Ryuzu’s house and put her to bed. There, he left Emilia in Ram’s care, and, so he would not waste the interval before she wakes again, he immediately set out for the building where Roswaal was recuperating.

Garfiel’s silent glare all that time he was in the house gave him cause for concern, but fortunately, Subaru didn’t encounter any resistance on the way and managed to get there without any problems.

However, the instant he took Roswaal into his sights, all that caution scattered like a mist.

Roswaal: “Fuuumu.”

Looking up at the restless Subaru, Roswaal let out a deep and meaningful sigh. And then, he held up a single finger and lightly wagged it in front of Subaru.

Roswaal: “Myyy you certainly seem much more aaaaa than last I saw you. Thaaat’s a good sign.”

Subaru: “Don’t try to be funny. I’m not in the mood for pranks or jokes right now. I’m prepared to use force if I have to.”

Snarling this at the carefree Roswaal, Subaru advanced to the side of the bed and pressed his palms onto the sheets. And, glaring down at the clown at extreme close-range,

Subaru: “I just came back from taking the Trial— And I have a mountain of things to ask you.”

Roswaal: “...Is that, so. You have taken the Trial. I see. I see. lli seeee

Whereas in Subaru's time, several days had already passed since the Trial where he bid farewell to his parents, in real time, it would only have been less than an hour ago. And, it was now the third time he had seen Roswaal's inexplicable reactions to being told about the Trial.

The first time, there seemed to be a flash of violent emotion so brief it was as if it was never there. The second time, he appeared to have somewhat calmly accepted the fact. But even so, it was laced with a certain uncharacteristic tinge of melancholy.

And this third time, what was that reaction supposed to be? Personally, Subaru had hoped for a flash of anger like the first time, believing that if Roswaal could be incited into a rage, he might just let his mouth slip.

But, completely contrary to Subaru's hopes, Roswaal's lips instead curved into a smile,

Roswaal: "Iin that case, allow me to ask you a question."

Subaru: "Huh? What are you talking about? You? Ask questions...? If you keep playing around I'm going to seriously flip, you bastard."

Roswaal: "I can understand that you have reaaason to be angry. And I am asking with that in mind. If we are of the same opinion... I don't see why you would decliine to cooooperate."

Subaru: "If I answer your question... No, wait."

While Subaru was trying to press down his anger, Roswaal raised this proposal. For a moment, Subaru almost accepted. But he instantly severed that thought when he realized that accepting would have meant being swept along by the atmosphere created by Roswaal, just like all those times before.

Unless he made an effort to resist, the result will be just as miserable. So, in order to change the outcome, he must change his behavior from this point onward.

Subaru: "I'm not answering your questions. I'm the one who has questions. I go first."

Roswaal: "...Aya, buuut isn't that awwwfully rude?"

Subaru: "I'm not saying I won't answer any questions, but I have the feeling we won't get anywhere if I just go along with whatever you say. So let's nip that in the bud first."

Seeing Subaru's obstinate attitude, Roswaal closed a single eye and lightly sighed. Then, holding out both palms, he made an "Aalright" gesture,

Roswaal: "Ask whatever you liiike. Indeed, it doesn't always have to be me managing the paaace of the conversation."

Subaru: "Even though it's actually kinda creepy when you're so reasonable... Well, no point getting hung up on that. So, question— What kind of Contract have you sealed with Beatrice?"

Roswaal: "———"

Suddenly silent, it seemed as though Roswaal was caught off guard by that query.

Seeing his cheeks stiffen, albeit slightly, Subaru was convinced that he had struck a critical question.

The previous loop had brought about newly discovered facts and unexplained events, and Subaru must set about finding the answers to these mysteries. Foremost among them— were the questions surrounding Beatrice, and whether it was at the Sanctuary or the mansion, the only person he could ask was Roswaal.

More than anything, their conversation at their parting and the Gospel in her hands were all burned into his mind, impossible to forget.

It was a question he must not take lightly. One which will decide how he will interact with that girl from now on.

—How he will face Beatrice at their unavoidable meeting in this loop.

Subaru: "Answer me, Roswaal. Don't give me any of that «You won't answer mine, so I won't answer yours» crap. Answer the question."

Growing impatient with Roswaal's prolonged silence, Subaru repeated his demand for a response.

Asserting its presence within his chest was the frustration that was the manifestation of his desire to overturn that revolting sense of foreboding.

Every second of silence felt like minutes as he waited for the reply. Until, at last, Roswaal opened his mouth,

Roswaal: “—The fact that you are asking this question here, does that mean you recall it?”

But, instead of an answer as Subaru had hoped, Roswaal replied with a question of his own. Clicking his tongue in frustration at his attitude, “Shut up!”, Subaru swung his arm in front of Roswaal,

Subaru: “Why are you replying with another question? Even if I take a hundred steps back and let you ask, you will answer mine first. I’m not giving up my turn.”

Roswaal: “Is that so. Then, let’s proceed by taking turns. Your question was about the Contract between Beatrice and me, waaas it not? There is no Contract sealed between Beatrice and me. That is the answer.”

Subaru: “Wh—!?”

Caught off guard by that sudden turn, Subaru found himself speechless. Reaching out a hand to Subaru, who had inadvertently lost his words, “Nooow”, Roswaal went on,

Roswaal: “This time it’s your turn to answer myyy question— Have you remembered?”

Subaru: “...Remember, what. Just so you know, our relationship isn’t deep enough that we can communicate by telepathy here. Don’t go assuming I can put together your sentences without a subject.”

Roswaal: “That reply, already gave me the answer to my question... Unfortunate.”

Although Subaru had hoped to get some kind of revenge, it would seem he was no match for Roswaal after all. With a certain shade of sadness, Roswaal turned down his eyes, and,

Roswaal: “It seems, I didn’t make it.”

Subaru: “...What.”

Roswaal: “It’s your turn to ask. Do beeetter this time, and ask me a question I caaannot dodge.”

Covering over Subaru's confounded voice, Roswaal's self-awareness about his question dodging didn't make it any less infuriating. Subaru took a deep breath to control his emotions, and pressed a finger to his temple and began to think,

Subaru: "You said you have no contractual relationship with Beatrice, right? Then, why is Beatrice living in your mansion? I can't understand what your relationship with Beatrice is supposed to be."

Roswaal: "That's two questions now. You've been inquiring about Beatrice ever since you got here, where does that leave Emilia-sama? Or, could it be that you prefer those who look like young children?"

Subaru: "I'm not attracted to little kids and I have no intention of going the romantic conquest route with her. But I do intend to shake up the status quo a bit, so I'll be choosing her route in that sense."

It was true, that whenever he thought about Beatrice, Subaru would feel a certain aching in his heart.

But this was different from the aching he'd feel when he thought of Emilia or Rem, and Subaru quite couldn't understand what it meant.

Except, even after seeing the Gospel in Beatrice's hands, he still felt this.

—And he didn't want to believe that the relationship between him and Beatrice was just something counterfeit written in some strange book.

Subaru: "That's why I need to find out more about her. And it seems the only person who's deeply associated with her is you. So I can only ask you."

Roswaal: "You try to collect everything that catches your eye, but it will only become an obstacle when the time comes to choose what is truly important. Such naïveté only hinders you from seeing the thing that is most important to your heart, I think."

Subaru: "I realize my hands are already full. So now I'm just trying to grab her with my mouth. Got a problem with that?"

Roswaal: "How could I possibly? Although I get the feeling you are just saying that for appearances sake, there is nothing wrong with that— In fact, I do wonder how you will answer when the time comes."

Acknowledging Subaru's words, Roswaal's voice trailed to an indiscernible whisper towards the end. Subaru's gaze sharpened at those words, and, receiving that gaze, Roswaal continued, "In thaaat case.",

Roswaal: "The reason why Beatrice resides in the mansion, waaas it? She resides in my mansion due to her ties with the House of Mathers. If you must know, it was by the favor of the head of the House of Mathers many generations ago that she became the Guardian of the Forbidden Library. It has been so through the generations, and remains the same, now it that had passed to me."

Subaru: "Employed as its Guardian? ...Then, how is that any different from a Contract?"

Roswaal: "The questioning format seems to be a bit different from what we've agreed...? Weeell, no matter. There iiis already little meaning in asking any more questions from my side. You are already aware of Beatrice's identity as a Spirit, I assuuume?"

Subaru nodded in affirmation to Roswaal's question. Although he never actually got to see Beatrice's Spirit-form, her self-proclamation and her intimidating presence both confirmed this fact.

Seeing Subaru's nod, Roswaal lifted up a finger,

Roswaal: "To Spirits, a Contract with a human carries tremendous significance. The relationship between Emilia-sama and the Great Spirit-sama is exaactly that."

Subaru: "...Yeah, Emilia's been struggling with all the annoying conditions too. But the Great Spirit-sama hasn't been showing his face lately, has he."

Having been killed by Puck three times, and after their clash of perspectives over the sleeping Rem, there was an insurmountable gap between them. And since he mysteriously went into hiding before that gap could be resolved, Subaru's feelings towards that little cat was still rather hard to define.

Roswaal: "The Great Spirit-sama's whims aside, Beatrice is no exception. That child and I are in a cooperating relaaationship, to a certain extent. But it is nothing more than a sort of mutual noninterference while our interests are aligned. It would be unlikely for her to help me achieeeve my goals, and the reverse is true as well."

Subaru: "I can see how you can appear to be on good terms with Beako while actually being indifferent, but that has nothing to do with the terms of her Contract."

Roswaal: "Ooh my, you must excuse me. But contractual relationships are something else entirely. Beatrice, being a Spirit, takes Contracts extremely seriously. To speak to her on the topic of Contracts would be a different, and quite laaarger, issue. After all, that child is still bound by a Contract from four-hundred years ago."

Picking up something he could not let slide, Subaru suddenly leaned himself up to Roswaal shouting "That's it!"

Subaru: "That Contract from four-hundred years ago, I want to know the details."

Roswaal: "Spirits' mouths don't open so easily when it comes to the contents of their coontracts. No involved parties from that time could possibly still remain, so unless Beatrice herself speaks, there is no one else who knows of the cooontents of her Contract."

Subaru: "Damn it, that's useless! If I could just find out what's in that Contract..."

Then he would know why that girl was hiding herself in a room all alone, wouldn't he?

Roswaal: "However, there is one thing worth mentioning."

Subaru: "—?"

Roswaal: "Since Beatrice is bound by the Contract from four-hundred years ago, to seal any new Contract which overlaps with the original would be impossible. So, if you wish to bring her out of that place, then you must find a way to break the existiing Contract."

Subaru: "Break... the Contract?"

Roswaal: "Fulfilling it, would aalso work. But since there is good chance that the other party to the Contract is already gone, breaaaking the Contract would be the smarter course, don't you thiiiink?"

It was nothing short of miraculous that Roswaal would be offering constructive opinions for a change. Initially caught off guard by his words, Subaru's expression abruptly changed as though a veil was suddenly lifted from his eyes,

Subaru: "—When did I ever say I wanted to bring Beatrice outside?"

Subaru, saying this quietly, fixed sharpened eyes on Roswaal, mere inches away.

Placing his hands on the bed, his fingers began knocking on the sheets like the second-hand of a clock. Dropping his gaze to look at this gesture, Roswaal closed a single eye, before reflecting Subaru within his sole yellow pupil,

Roswaal: “You really— are a man who likes to notice things people doon’t want you to notice.”

Subaru: “What do you...”

Roswaal: “Either way, this time is already meeeaningless to me. Perhaps, we should eend this conversation here?”

Subaru: “Are— are you fucking kidding me!?”

Different from before, within Roswaal’s eyes, there emerged a color of disappointment. With that strange expression, Roswaal spilled out a sigh from a face seemingly drained of all liveliness.

Roswaal: “No matter what you say now, it could no longer move me... So you may do whateever you like.”

Subaru: “You’ve got to be joking!? This is important... We are getting to something important and you start acting like that!? There are still things I need to ask you...”

Roswaal: “If you wish to ask, you are freee to ask. But whether I answer them seriously or not, would depend compleeetely on whether I feel like it.”

The more agitated Subaru became, the more deprived of the tremors of emotion Roswaal seemed to become. In front of Subaru, whose face had turned red with rage, Roswaal merely combed his fingers through his deep blue hair, and tilted his head,

Roswaal: “You have, no more queestions?”

Subaru: “—Tch. Alright, I know that Beatrice is bound by a Contract and is living inside the mansion. We can leave the details for now. There’s something else I want to ask. About that black book she has... I want you to tell me what that is.”

Roswaal: “Eeehh, you saw it? Any thoughts? What do you think it is?”

Subaru: “Don’t reply with another question— But I think it’s... something similar... to the books the Witch Cultists have, or, at least, I’m guessing.”

Subaru’s stuttered reply was like a plea for the words to be refuted. But, hearing this, Roswaal showed an expression as if he couldn’t hold back a yawn,

Roswaal: “The Gospels in the Witch Cultists’ possession are mediums of the Witch’s will, and describe the path leading to their owners’ desired future. Weell, aside from vague directions, they are rather labor-intensive to follow as far as prophetic books go.”

Subaru: “—! You know?”

Roswaal: “There is no need to be toooo surprised. There are Witch Cultists here as well, considering this is a facility belonging to a Witch different from the Witch they worship. Being the manager of the Sanctuary, it wasn’t just once or twice that I’ve had to exchange blows with the likes of them.”

Subaru: “Th—then, they can really see the future...?”

If they could see the future without dying, that would be an ability far more powerful than Subaru’s Return by Death. It was not that he was jealous of such an ability, but if all the members of the Witch Cult were equipped with this overpowered item, that would be nothing to scoff at. But, seeing Subaru’s shudder, Roswaal shook his head,

Roswaal: “It’s not that convenient of an item. First of all, the number of entries themselves vary from cultist to cultist. The contents are vague and subject to interpretation. More importantly, no one except the owner of the Gospel can read it. To anyone else, its contents will only appear to be indecipherable nonsense. And so, they are only incomplete maps of the future.”

Subaru: “Incomplete...”

Subaru couldn’t hide his relief to hear this. But then again, if the Gospels were truly prophetic books with the power to describe the future, Subaru would never have been able to win against Petelgeuse. In that sense, it’s obvious that even the Sin Archbishops’ Gospels couldn’t have reached that level. However,

Subaru: “That’d be a completely different topic. Then, what about Beatrice’s book...”

Roswaal: “If you’re asking whether it is the same as the ones in the Witch Cultists’ possession, then the answer is that it is, and it isn’t.”

Subaru: “Stop playing around! This is important!”

Roswaal: “I am doing nooo such thing. Although what Beatrice has is a Gospel, it is of a different origin from the Witch Cultists’. For the Witch Cultists’ Gospels are imperfect, whereas the one belonging to Beatrice is perfect.”

Subaru: “Perfect...?”

Roswaal: “Yes, it is perfect. Unlike the defective items that fluctuate between uncertain futures, wavering in their recorded contents.”

Seeing Subaru confused, Roswaal’s face only brightened.

His expression and tone were as if he was basking in pride. Subaru didn’t know what to say in front of this sudden transformation, but what made him lose his words in the truest sense of the phrase, was what came afterwards,

Subaru: “—!?”

Roswaal reached behind with his right hand and produced a book with black binding.

There was no mistaking it at such a close distance that it was, without a doubt, a Gospel.

Roswaal: “This is one of the only two complete Gospels in existence. Myself, and Beatrice, are the only two people who possess one... that is.”

Subaru: “———”

Before Subaru’s eyes, Roswaal waved the book left and right in his hand. However, Subaru had no mental capacity to care about such gestures now.

The fact that Roswaal was holding a Gospel same as the ones in the hands of the Witch Cult was indeed shocking. The fact that the one in Beatrice’s hand was also a Gospel, and the fact that the words she said to him at their parting were confirmed, was also shocking.

—But they were not what dominated Subaru's mind in that moment,

Subaru: "That's... a Gospel that records the future?"

Roswaal: "Wiiithout a doubt. This is the genuine Gospel."

Subaru: "You know... the future? Right now, everything that is happening now... is in that book...?"

Roswaal: "It iis written. Although you won't be able to read it."

Who cares about that. At this moment, whether Subaru could read it is irrelevant. There was only one significance. Only one single thing he had to ask. That is,

Subaru: "The future, what will happen... is written... in that book?"

Roswaal: "It doesn't describe the entiirety of the world, but it does reveal a portion of the owner's fuuture."

Subaru: "That things will become the way they are now... You knew that beforehand?"

Roswaal: "It took quite a lot of effort to produce the same situation as described, you know? I was rather hoping for a little praise for all my efforts behind the scenes."

Subaru could not stop his voice from trembling.

At the source of that trembling, was the seeping of some violent emotion. Just what that emotion was, and at whom it was directed, was immediately obvious— That is,

Subaru: "If you knew... everything that was going to happen..."

Roswaal: "—Fuumu."

Subaru: "—You, knowingly left Rem to die?"

Roswaal: “Rem, whooooo would you be refeeeeeeerring to?”

Subaru: “—I’ll KILL YOU!! ROSWAAAAAAAAAAAAAL!!”

In that instant, uncontrollable rage propelled Subaru’s body to move.

Flying forward onto the bed, his hands clenched tight onto the bedridden Roswaal’s neck. With unnatural strength never seen before, Subaru’s grip dug into the slender neck, carving an expression of agony onto the clown’s blue and white face.

Subaru: “YOU KNEW EVERYTHING AND YOU—!!”

If he knew, if he already knew, if he could have prevented the tragedies— and what happened to Rem from ever happening—

Subaru: “THE REASON I LEFT REM TO DIE— WAS YOU!?”

Consumed by overflowing fury, he blew out his regrets, and all his impulses were directed to the intent to kill this man before his eyes. His actions forgot all reason as emotions and love transmuted into force.

And, just like this, unable to utter a sound, Roswaal silently waited for Subaru’s hands to snap his neck—

???: “—I see, «Th’ guise cannot cover th’ Wolgarms’ stench»!!”

—Impact.

Sensing a solid, sharp tactile sensation striking him from the side, Subaru felt the right half of his face destroyed as he was sent flying into the air. His body slammed into an immovable wall, and fell head first onto the ground. His thoughts went blank at the sudden blow, and his body couldn’t move at all.

Blood flowed from his ear and nose, and the right side of his vision was dyed absolute black. His eye may have been completely crushed.

???: “—Ever since y’came outta the Tomb yer stench’s shot up. Didn’t believe it so I thought I’d watch ya, but ain’ this ‘xactly as I thought!?”

Footsteps. The uncouth sound crept up to his side. His body would not even permit him to crawl. Immobile, front and back, Subaru's head was pulled up,

Garfiel: "Reekin' o' the stench of the Witch, the fuck y'think yer doin'? Should I ask yer body? Oy? This place still needs that bastard. The fuck're ya try'n ta pull, yeah!?"

A blond youth. Garfiel. Or something. Assailed by that voice full of fury and murder, Subaru's consciousness grew distant.

Half his head, though there was no way to confirm it, seemed to have been crushed. He'll die, probably. If he died like this, that'd be about the most pathetic way to go.

If he Returned by Death while clinging onto this sordid thought, would he really still have the desire to save this place?

Subaru: "I don't, know... Rem."

With the end of that final syllable, Subaru's consciousness descended into darkness.

Arc 4 Chapter 38 - Caterpillar

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 11, Chapter 3 “Friend”, Part 4-5

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

—The first thing that drew on his consciousness was the continuous sound of dripping water.

Falling at equal intervals, the droplets carved out a constant rhythm, and with every beat sent into the silence of the room, Subaru’s submerged consciousness was guided little by little into wakefulness.

His slumbering brain resumed its activity, and his rebooted nerves sensed the circulation of blood through his veins. Twisting his body, he tried to rise up with a groan— But couldn’t.

Dropping back onto the ground, his limbs would not listen to his commands, and he could do nothing more than to scrape his face against the cold surface of the floor. At the same time, trying to tax his recovering senses to survey his surroundings, he found that his vision was completely painted over with darkness.

—Both my eyes are blind!?

That was the immediate answer he arrived at as he confirmed his situation, but before fear could overtake him, he noticed the tight pressure binding his eyelids and abandoned that conclusion. He determined that he had been blindfolded, before realizing the strangeness of the situation.

Instead of his eyes being blinded, they had both been covered. In addition, the fact that his body couldn’t move was for the same reason, because his hands and feet had been firmly tied behind his back.

There was the sensation of a slender rope wrapped around his wrists and ankles. With his hands behind his back, even if he struggled, it would be no easy task to break free.

Subaru: “Wh—what is this...!?”

Fortunately, he wasn't gagged, so he could still use his voice normally. But with his hands and feet literally tied, his mouth was all he had left. Truth is, whoever put Subaru in this situation probably wouldn't be amicable enough to be satisfied by small talk.

Fear began to emerge from the inexplicable situation and the absence of information on his surroundings. In midst of these interwoven emotions, Subaru held his breath and forced his thoughts to move.

Organize the current circumstances. His eyes were blindfolded. His hands and feet were bound, impossible to break loose. He still had his voice. Should he yell for help? That would only draw his captor. Was there something nearby he could use to free himself from his restraints? It would be difficult to crawl around searching like this. The right side of his head was hurting, and, the moment he placed his consciousness on it, it began to assert its existence with throbbing pain.

Subaru: "Head hurts..."

Becoming aware of the pain on the side of his head, Subaru remembered what had happened to him right before losing consciousness.

After Returning by Death and leaving the Tomb, Subaru confronted Roswaal with the new facts and speculations, and when he flew into a rage at Roswaal's unforgivable statements, Subaru was knocked down by Garfiel, who had been watching him.

Or rather, "knocked down" would be too much of an understatement for the overwhelming force that had crushed him. Just a restraining strike from Garfiel had broken through his skull, and it wouldn't have been surprising if he had died just like that.

Subaru: "If I died, this would be after Return by Death, but..."

If that really was the case, Subaru's restart point should be in the Tomb right after the Trial. His soul should have been spirited to the room inside the Tomb, barely an hour before he headed to Roswaal's bedroom, as per the rules of Return by Death.

At least, Subaru's experience of being tied up and confined was only limited to that one time he flipped over the coffee table while imitating some anime, completely pissing off his father who threw him into the storehouse as punishment.

That was a memory from way back, even before he entered elementary school, and Return by Death couldn't have returned him that far. Then, assuming the restart point hadn't changed, the next conclusion would be that he was tied up immediately after Return by Death, but that should be impossible as well. So that only left him with one conclusion—

Subaru: "I failed... to die...?"

Whether it was the lingering pain in his head or his current situation, it would explain all of it.

He had committed an act of unsurpassable violence against Roswaal. With that in mind, his treatment was only morally right, even if it was not something he could emotionally accept.

???: "—Y'sure got a grasp of yer situation quickly, yeah?"

As though he had been waiting for Subaru to come to terms with his situation, a voice descended from above. Lifting his face, even though he couldn't see a thing, Subaru turned towards the direction of the voice. If he were to guess who the other person was just from the intonation of that voice,

Subaru: "Garfiel, is it?"

Garfiel: "Got that right too. Looks like yer head's still workin', that's a relief. Guess I smacked ya a bit too hard, my'bad my'bad."

Hearing his name being called, Garfiel apologized to the blindfolded Subaru. Even though the tone of his voice didn't exactly match its apologetic content, he went on with "Who would'a thought",

Garfiel: "I was just givin' y'a lil' pat, didn't think you'd almost die from that. Heard yer Emilia-sama's knight so I thought you'd have a bit more goin' there, but guess I overestimated ya, huh."

Subaru: "Sorry to disappoint you. My character's more of the brainy type than the physical type... So where are we, anyway?"

Replying with a scornful quip, Subaru cut directly to the chase. Hearing this, Garfiel let out a short sigh through his nose, and,

Garfiel: "Don't worry, yer still in th'Sanctuary. But this ain't the cathedral or th'Tomb, or one of them houses we're lendin' to the guests."

Subaru: “You’ve got a bondage room prepared? They say it’s good to be prepared, but if you’ve even got this kind of facility set up... Honestly I’m kinda creeped out.”

Garfiel: “Go complain to the creep who made it if y’think it’s bad taste. In fact, y’get to speak to her directly, don’t ya?”

Garfiel made plain his discontent, or rather a sincere sense of discomfort. As though having caught something within his words, Subaru’s face frowned up,

Subaru: “Directly... what do you mean...?”

Garfiel: “With the Witch’s stench all o’er ya, don’t go playin’ dumb now. Y’met her inside the Tomb, didn’t ya? Why else y’suddenly smell like this?”

Subaru: “Met inside the Tomb...?”

Something in Garfiel’s words was tugging at him.

The Tomb. The Trial. The person he encountered there. It was all a blank. After bidding farewell to his parents in the Trial, at the end, he went into the empty school building, and there—

Subaru: “The Witch...!”

—He encountered the Witch of Greed, Echidna.

With the sense of incongruity that came with the filling of the void, the existence of Echidna was restored to Subaru’s brain. He had already experienced this in the previous loop, so why had he forgotten it again?

Unless, it was the result of the condition imposed upon him at the end of their first meeting? But the fact that Return by Death could not overcome this effect was truly astounding.

Return by Death allowed him to carry over his memories, yet he would have no countermeasures against this direct interference. In other words, every time Subaru Returns by Death, he will have forgotten Echidna, and will only begin to remember when he is reminded again.

Subaru: “Then, was this the thing that Roswaal mentioned I’ve forgotten...?”

Only now, with the existence of the Witch restored, did Subaru realize this, but it was still a bit too early to draw such a conclusion. After all, despite being able to remember Echidna, he could find nothing in their conversations that would help him break through the present situation.

The way Roswaal said it, it was as though he wanted Subaru to remember something which, in and of itself, would reveal Roswaal's incomprehensible intentions.

Then again, this would only make sense if he was indeed in possession of a complete Gospel.

Garfiel: "Since yer quiet all of a sudden, should I take that as yer feelin' guilty?"

Subaru: "I'm not some high-school girl who'll die if she stops talking, so I'm just quietly thinking over a thing or two. Although a thing or two probably isn't enough at this point."

There were so many things to figure out that there wouldn't be enough cells in Subaru's brain to do it.

There was Emilia. Rem. Beatrice.

—Pretty much for every name in the female lineup, Subaru will have to dig himself out of the situation. And on top of that, there was the Sanctuary, Elsa, Roswaal's true intentions, and the Gospels. And then,

Subaru: "There's Garfiel... too."

To convince him and gain his support was an indispensable element of Subaru's blueprint of the plan to save the mansion. When it comes to repelling Elsa, there was no one else Subaru could draw on with greater combat capability. The fact that his strength could be counted on to match Elsa's was something Subaru had both witnessed with his eyes and personally experienced with his head.

Subaru: "...If I'm not mistaken, I'm pretty sure I got punched or kicked until my head was crushed, but what happened to that?"

Garfiel: "Hah. Took long enough for that topic t'come up. Yer head wasn't crushed, but it sure was cavin' in a bit. It'd be a nuisance if I just let ya die like that, so y'got a bit of healin'."

Subaru: "Healing... by whom?"

Garfiel: "Well who else was there t'do it 'cept me?"

Picking up some reverberations of pride in Garfiel's voice, Subaru was at a loss for words.

Who would have thought that the rough-and-brutish looking Garfiel would have studied healing magic? Still tied up, Subaru squirmed a little with his body.

Subaru: "My... head's still got its original shape and isn't a box or pyramid, right?"

Garfiel: "Next time it gets cracked I could make it into that shape if y'want."

With a stupid sigh, having received this answer, Subaru shrunk up his shoulders and confirmed that at least his body was out of the near-death situation.

In that case, the next question would be Garfiel's intentions.

Subaru: "Since you're the one who crushed it, it'd feel kinda weird to be thanking you for healing it, but... what was your aim in all this?"

Garfiel: "What. What kinda aim y'think I have?"

Subaru: "Considering the circumstances, from your standpoint, you made the right judgement to knock me down, so I won't complain. I completely lost my head and it was a good thing that you stopped me. That's just one of the mountain of things I don't want to say but couldn't help but want to say... If you catch my drift."

Garfiel: "That's a pretty damn complicated feelin'. It's not that I don't understand wantin' to bash that smug bastard's face in, but that'd be trouble for Granny and the others if y'do that."

It seemed that Garfiel shared Subaru's wonderful opinion of Roswaal. But since they both relied on Roswaal's existence in no small part, neither of them could put that feeling into practice.

To Subaru, Roswaal was the guarantor of his livelihood in this world, and to Garfiel and the others, he was a necessary existence as the manager of the Sanctuary. But seeing that the first reason Garfiel mentioned was Ryuzu—he must have been thinking more about the lives of the residents of the Sanctuary than about himself.

This only supported Frederica's assessment of her brother in the previous loop, that in fact, the reason he chose to remain in the Sanctuary instead of leaving with his sister was probably out of consideration for the feelings of the residents who stayed behind.

Subaru: "Because Ryuzu and the others are important to you, Roswaal's existence as their protector is indispensable. Without him and his demi-human fetish, the residents trapped in the Sanctuary won't be able to continue living as they are now, huh."

Garfiel: "Don't give me that embarrassing crap like y'understand everything. Who the hell y'think would stay here for sentimental reasons? I'm here cus I can't leave the place, so..."

Subaru: "You can't leave, even though your blood sibling Frederica could, Garf¹¹⁰?"

It was information he had just gained from the previous loop. Playing this card, Subaru listened for any change in Garfiel's demeanor. But the intensity of the reaction far surpassed Subaru's imaginations.

Subaru: "—t!"

There was a whistling of wind, and the next instant, a tremendous cracking boom rolled into the side of Subaru's head. The sound of air breaking apart reverberated through space, and with a stomp of his foot faster than the mind could process, the floor gave way, shattering, as the shape of the entire room contorted.

The ground bent upwards, and with a whimper, Subaru was tossed by the shockwave into the air. Unable to even brace himself, he tumbled across the solid floor, and was only forcefully stopped when he smashed into a wall ahead.

The impact on his back wrenched out all the contents of his lungs as the back of his head screamed with pain. Coughing, saliva drooled from the corner of Subaru's mouth. And, seeing this,

Garfiel: "Who th'fuck told you that, y'piece of shit? Was it Frederica runnin' her mouth about these unnecessary... No, no way she said this. We already severed our bond as siblings when we parted ways."

¹¹⁰ Notice how Subaru calls him by the same nickname Ram does.

Subaru: “That kind of thing’s just a figure of speech, there’s no way to actually sever the blood in your...”

Garfiel: “This here, now, bringin’ that up’s just even more weird, ain’t it. If y’wanted to use it, y’coulda found plenty o’better places to bring it up, couldn’t ya?”

Hearing Subaru’s winded response, Garfiel worked his disgustingly sharp intuition. The way he said it was as though while Subaru wasn’t paying attention, he had picked up on facts that even Subaru failed to notice.

Although Garfiel’s guess wasn’t far from the truth — in fact, it was almost spot on — the thought process he used to get there was far too direct.

It was as though he possessed some extraordinary perceptiveness, or, rather, possessed something impossible to ignore.

Subaru: “No way... you... too?”

—The moment the possibility struck him, Subaru could not conceal the tremors in his voice.

Garfiel: “———”

Subaru’s subjectless question received only an eerie silence in return.

In terms of time, only a few seconds had passed in that silence, but to Subaru, it was equivalent to an eternity.

No reply. Why wasn’t he talking. Was it because Subaru’s question was too vague? If he just plainly said that he doesn’t understand, or even gave him a kick, it would be better than this. The only hope Subaru could cling to was some short-circuited reaction like that. But,

Garfiel: “Me too... y’say.”

High-pitched footsteps. The sound of Garfiel’s soles striking upon the stone-tiled floor drew closer, and Subaru could tell that he squatted down beside him. Raising his head off the floor, he could feel Garfiel’s face drawing close to his, baring its fangs,

Garfiel: “And what make y’tthink that, huh, oy?”

Subaru: “Stop talking in a way that just stirs up even more bad feelings. I just said something that made no sense, right? It’d be alright if you could just straight up deny it... Couldn’t you?”

Garfiel: “What’re y’sayin like yer about t’cry?”

Ignoring Subaru’s pleading request, Garfiel replied in that same ambiguous voice. The indeterminate response only inflamed Subaru’s anxiety, his inner heart already a jumbled mess.

He wanted Garfiel to deny it, say it was some lucky guess. But the pregnant replies only deepened the sense of foreboding in Subaru’s heart.

Beatrice and Roswaal, both of whom he considered to be allies, were, one after the other, revealed to be owners of Gospels. For Subaru now, it would not be so strange if a third person was revealed.

Subaru: “Then...! That means you know too, don’t you...!”

Garfiel: “—Ah, so that’s what this’s about. Wonder where y’noticed.”

Subaru: “—!?”

His throat frozen by shock, Subaru traced the image of Garfiel within his blindfolded eyes.

The intonation of his voice, the listless sigh. None of it was like the Garfiel Subaru knew. But even as he relinquished these half-revealing words, the distance between them hadn’t changed,

Garfiel: “Y’look surprised, but it can’t be that strange. I’ve been livin’ in the Sanctuary forever, and we’ve known each other for a very long time. So the opportunities weren’t just once or twice.”

Subaru: “B—but you... Aren’t you supposed to hate the Witch? So much that you’d overreact like that... and yet...”

Garfiel: “Yeah, I do. I hate the Witch, I don’t trust yer stinkin’ like the Witch, and I don’t got no affections for that half-devil Emilia-sama, either. But then again, I can’t say what that thing says’s wrong. At least, it defin’ly knows what I wanted to know.”

Subaru: “What you wanted... to know...”

Garfiel: “—I got no reason t’tell ya anything. But why don’t y’try askin’? Y’might not get another chance.”

After Garfiel spat out these words, Subaru could sense him standing up. Then, he drew away from Subaru, apparently making his way to the exit of the prison room— and placed his hand on the door.

Hearing the wooden door creak, “Hey!”, Subaru shouted to the departing Garfiel.

Subaru: “Wait...! Wh-what’ll happen to me. Or I mean what’s happening right now?”

Garfiel: “For tryin’ to assassinate that Roswaal bastard, yer sure gettin’ off light. For now, you’ll just stay restrained and confined till the results come out.”

Confined, that was the word that came up just yesterday. From Roswaal’s own mouth, no less. The fact that his self-professed status was now passed onto Subaru for enacting violence against him was nothing short of ironic.

In front of Subaru, who did not make another sound, Garfiel snorted through his nose,

Garfiel: “You’ll be gettin’ meals every mornin’ and evenin’. Don’t try anythin’ funny. I’ll be lookin’ after ya.”

Subaru: “As if... that’s the kind of thing I’d be worried about right now! Results? You said results? What results? What are you waiting for...?”

Garfiel: “What results, ain’t that obvious?”

This time, Garfiel replied as though he had just heard a most foolish question,

Garfiel: “—The results of Emilia-sama’s Trials. After she heard what y’did, she’s gotten terribly enthusiastic, almost like she’s tryin’ to atone for what you’ve done.”

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—After Garfiel left the room, Subaru, alone in his prison, sank deep into the sea of thought.

He could not get the words Garfiel left behind at their parting out of his mind.

In order to clear Subaru's name, Emilia had rallied herself to challenge the Trials. Perhaps she thought that if the Sanctuary could be liberated, her achievement would be enough to absolve Subaru of his crime.

It was just like Emilia, to not doubt Subaru at all.

Subaru: "But, in that moment, I..."

Despite being overtaken by rage, in the end, Subaru genuinely wanted to strangle Roswaal.

With his hands wrapped around that person's neck, he had used his tightening grip to seal off his airway, relentlessly building up strength as if to snap his neck, or otherwise suffocate him.

Although he could not move his hands, bound behind his back, Subaru could tell that his fingers were trembling. Forgetting the passion of that moment, all that remained in his hands was a dark remnant of the heat that nearly took another person's life. Inside his empty stomach, a sense of nausea began to build.

Even more so, considering the target of that murderous intent was someone close to him.

Subaru: "I just... don't know anymore..."

Who to trust, what to think, and what to do, none of it made sense any more.

What was Beatrice's position? Why did she have a Gospel? And what were those days they spent together?

What was Roswaal thinking? Why would that guy have a completed Gospel? What did he want Subaru to remember? And what was the true meaning of his inexplicable role in all this?

How could he help Emilia pass the Trials? Or rather, was it right to push her towards the Trials in the first place? He couldn't even begin to answer that question.

What was Garfiel's intention, and did he really have a Gospel? It will be impossible to defeat Elsa without his help. Yet, with their relationship deteriorating after every Return by Death, how could he get him to the mansion?

What should he do about Elsa's attack, should he repel or evacuate? And why was there a difference between the timings of the first and second attacks? Why did that murderer know about the escape passage no one was supposed to know about? Who was Elsa's employer? What will he have to do to defeat her? Regardless, he could never forgive her.

And why was the Sanctuary created? What was the outline of the remaining Trials, and why did the Trials exist in the first place? What was the goal of Echidna, sleeping in her Tomb, and how can he meet with her again? And, at the end of the last loop, what happened to the depopulated Sanctuary?

In that final moment, what was it that killed and devoured Subaru?

Subaru: "I can't... answer... a single one."

Round and round and round, these questions without answers endlessly circled in his head.

With his eyelids painfully bound and his vision completely sealed, deprived of information about the world around him, there was nowhere his questions could turn except inside himself.

His insides packed with nothing but mysteries and doubts, he had come to a deadlock.

What tormented Subaru was not only his unanswered doubts, but also anxiety at the time that he was passing in vain, submerged in these fruitless thoughts.

Since his eyes were covered, he could not say for certain, but Subaru's feelings told him that most likely a day had already passed since the night he strangled Roswaal.

It was dark, so he was probably confined inside a hidden building in the forest. The chilliness of the room was conspicuous even considering the fact that not the slightest light could slip through.

Compared to the daytime temperatures he had experienced so far, he couldn't help but notice the drastic temperature drop here. So perhaps, it would be more constructive to consider that it was already night after sunset. If he followed the assumption that it was night, then it was clear that at least a whole day had passed.

Ever since being summoned to this parallel world, Natsuki Subaru had sustained a fair number of injuries both light and severe. And his body still carried memories of being healed of wounds of all the various degrees.

So, judging from experience, having half his head crushed and his skull cracked open was clearly supposed to be a fatal wound. The fact that he came out of it alive without Ferris was honestly nothing short of a miracle, which only served to show how skilled Garfiel must be.

Basically, in this world, as long as the person doesn't die, almost all injuries can be healed, depending on the abilities of the healer. But naturally, the more severe the wound, the heavier the burden it would be to heal them.

Bodily fatigue can only be restored with stamina, and in the same way, Subaru's recent wounds could not have recovered to such an extent in a matter of a few hours, or even the same night.

More than likely, a night had passed. But even more convincing was the fact that,

Subaru: "I'm... hungry..."

His empty stomach, which hadn't received anything in all that time he spent sleeping, was aching and groaning endlessly, asserting its existence.

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The passage of time and the indistinct hours gradually wore at Subaru's mind.

He couldn't tell how much time had passed since then, and his restraints remained unchanged. Just like this, Subaru was left inside the prison room as time went by.

Subaru: "——"

He tried counting the seconds to keep track of time inside the void, but after counting for an hour when he felt like he was about to go mad, he finally abandoned the idea.

Besides, what difference would it make at this point, even if he knew the time? After all,

Subaru: “It’s... probably too late...”

Meals had been brought to Subaru six times. If they followed the schedule of once every morning and night, it would mean that three days had already passed. Three days after Subaru woke inside the Tomb— would make this the fifth day since arriving in the Sanctuary.

Even if he left for the mansion this morning, he would only barely make it in time for the assumed timing of Elsa’s attack. The moment he passed that point in time, he had already missed the deadline.

In fact, Subaru had fumbled in the very first moments of this loop.

No amount of regret was enough for allowing himself to be consumed by rage and throwing himself at Roswaal. If he hadn’t lost control of his emotions, he would have been able to confirm far more information from Roswaal, and, above all, his relationship with Garfiel wouldn’t have worsened to the point where he’d be imprisoning him.

The consequence of abandoning himself to that boiling heat of emotion, was this current caterpillar-like state.

He hadn’t done any of the things he was supposed to do and didn’t even get to see the faces of those he wanted to protect. Instead, he was here in this unsightly form, cowering in fear of the approaching time.

That is, Subaru had already given up on this loop.

Subaru: “—I really... fucked this up...”

Because of that momentary lapse, he had lost the chance to prevent the tragedy that was about to befall the mansion. Which, in turn, meant that the survival of the four girls inside the mansion had become hopeless.

Rem, Petra, Frederica, Beatrice, Subaru was knowingly leaving them to die. After he had just screamed, denouncing Roswaal, for doing the very same thing.

Subaru: “...Damnit, me. Why didn’t I die?”

He just wanted to die. If the restart point hadn’t changed, if he could really start over again, then Subaru would return to that night and face against his odds once more. Although he would still be stumbling

blind, at a loss about where to begin, at least it would be better than this unsightly state. Surely, he could do better than this. He must do better than this.

Subaru: “Otherwise, what’s the point of...”

Was he prepared to accept this resignation, and bite down on his lips and bear witness to the end of this world?

Having judged that saving the mansion was no longer possible, and that death in this loop was inevitable, Subaru immediately committed suicide and Returned by Death— was not what happened.

It was certainly the worst possible situation and awaiting Subaru in this life was only an empty future devoid of meaning. He should gamble on Return by Death and reverse the world and strive towards the best possible future. But,

Subaru: “If I return without learning anything, I’ll just be right back where I started.”

At least, Subaru needed to find out what happened in the Sanctuary after he was gone.

Just what happened on the sixth day? That alone needed to be confirmed. And it was for this reason alone that, no matter how much Subaru wanted to scream his throat hoarse and clench his teeth until they cracked, he swallowed down his regrets towards the mansion, and resigned himself to this loop.

If now was the fifth day, something should happen tomorrow.

Over the last three days, only Garfiel and someone else tasked with taking care of Subaru visited the prison. The caretaker always stayed silent, probably following Garfiel’s instructions, so Subaru couldn’t tell who it was. But from the way she wiped Subaru’s restrained body, and her motions as she fed Subaru by hand, he determined she was most likely a woman.

In an environment where his every move was being watched, there was no opportunity to investigate further, and so the real identity of Garfiel’s assistant remained unknown.

However, this must be a place where Emilia, who had rallied herself to save Subaru, couldn’t find.

Most likely, it was a secret location known only to Garfiel and his assistant, where Subaru could not hope to be discovered, and much less call for help. In fact, if Garfiel and Roswaal had both decided to confine him here, then it would be pointless to escape anyway.

Subaru: “If Emilia could pass the Trials to save me, that’d be amazing, but...”

If the situation was reversed, Subaru was confident he would pass the Trials for Emilia’s sake. But Subaru had never imagined that Emilia would try to overcome the Trials for him. And he never thought he meant so much to her that he would be her motivating force. That was just how much Subaru undervalued himself in his mind.

But in reality, the fact that no good news came after three days probably meant that, just like the loops before this, Emilia couldn’t pass the Trial no matter how many times she challenged it.

In other words, the situation at the mansion, at the Sanctuary, with Subaru, and Emilia, had all come to an impacted deadlock. Exactly like what Garfiel had once shouted to him.

Subaru: “After all, I...”

—Have to do something.

For Emilia, the mansion, the Sanctuary, every single problem that came up, he must overcome with his own two hands, and with the only weapon at his disposal.

A quiet resolve. Never good at giving up, it was the only reason Subaru went on living.

After thinking for a long, long time, he came to the same conclusion he had already reached so many times before. Seeing it was more than his fingers could count, Subaru nodded to his heart, and waited for time to pass.

—When something finally happened, was when he felt something shaking his body as it was drifting into sleep.

Subaru: “—Mn?”

Someone was grasping his shoulders, shaking him awake as Subaru returned from his shallow slumber into reality.

He noticed saliva drooling down the corner of his lips, and since he couldn't use his hands, he nudged over his shoulder to try to wipe it. It was a strenuous activity, but, apparently having gotten used to using his upper body, he managed to wipe it off,

Subaru: "Who... is it?"

His voice was still hoarse from having just woken up, in addition to the recent screaming.

He had promised himself not to scream like that again or his throat will break apart, and by now, he was already more or less desensitized to the pain that felt like he was going to spew blood. Although, it was nothing to be happy about.

Hearing Subaru's response, the person who woke him let out a short sigh. And,

???: "Sorry to do this in the middle of your nap... but can you move, Natsuki-san?"

Subaru: "Aauh?"

Hearing the voice belonging to someone he never imagined would be here, Subaru couldn't help but let out a stupid sound. Perhaps mistaking Subaru's surprise for drowsiness, the person mumbled "Oh, come on" in a quiet voice and gave Subaru a light slap on the face,

???: "I'm also taking quite a risk coming here to help you, you know, so can you please liven up a bit? I'm pretty sure we'll both be sorry if things ended here."

Saying this, he cut the ropes binding Subaru's hands and feet with a blade. Regaining the long-lost freedom of his limbs, Subaru reaffirmed this sensation and brusquely pulled off his blindfold,

Subaru: "Augh... Hands, feet... Even my eyes are hurting."

In the center of Subaru's thin, still-crooked vision, he made out the shape of a man who looked like he really didn't want to be here.

A character who was here for no discernable reason, Otto Suwen made his unexpected entry onto the stage.

Arc 4 Chapter 39 - Fhrend

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 11, Chapter 3 “Friend”, Part 6, and Volume 11, Chapter 4 “The Value of a Life”, Part 1

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken – [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

Otto: “What, what’s with that bewildered face like you just saw something mind-bogglingly unbelievable at the end of a dream and now your brain’s melting.”

Subaru: “...That’s, an exaggerated way of putting it but there’s no need to correct anything so let’s just say it’s something like that.”

Otto sighed, resting both his hands on his hips, and Subaru, turning his wrists confirming that his hands were free, dropped onto the floor looking back up at Otto.

After all, having been tied up for over three days, just moving his body made it creak and ache. Since it was so difficult to turn over in that tied up position, he had only been periodically flipped at mealtimes. But, it was more than just a problem with blood circulation, as he was starting to notice other defects. Namely,

Subaru: “Otto, this might just be because I just took the blindfold off, but... my right eye’s not seeing too well. Or, rather than not well... it’s more like it can’t see at all. What’s up with that?”

Otto: “What is up with it... If you ask me, I’m a bit hesitant to say as well... I could put it more elegantly and sugarcoat it... or I could put it bluntly and say exactly what it is. Which would you prefer?”

Subaru: “Sugarcoat it so I don’t get shocked and tell me bluntly so I know what’s actually happening.”

Otto: “That’s awfully greedy... Uhhh, on the starboard-side of Natsuki-san’s auspicious visage, your vision had been inevitably shrouded in darkness, forever closed to light...”

Subaru: “Uh. I wasn’t asking for something that edgy, but I think I get the point.”

Hearing Otto’s dressed-up description of Subaru’s malaise, Subaru held out his hand and stopped the explanation halfway through. Then, putting his extended hand on his right eye, he carefully felt around to confirm it.

—The right side of his vision had felt as though it had been completely cut off, and no image was coming through. And once he touched it, Subaru understood why this organ was slacking on its job.

Or, rather than slacking, it was more like it had packed its bags and went home. Because all that was left where his right eye used to be, was an empty hole.

Subaru: “I thought... he said I was healed.”

Otto: “The bleeding was stopped, and the broken bones were pieced together. But healing magic depends on the healer, and it isn’t omnipotent... Bringing dead parts back to life would be a bit...”

Otto mumbled, looking at Subaru with sympathy. Seeing that look, Subaru slackened his lips powerlessly and muttered “No helping it, I guess”,

Subaru: “People usually die when their heads get crushed. So I think I’m ok with just losing one eye... but if both my eyes died I think I’ll probably lose the will to live.”

Otto: “That’s pretty optimistic... You aren’t going into despair, are you? Please don’t, I don’t know if we can go on without you, Natsuki-san.”

For someone who had just lost an important organ like the right eye, Subaru was awfully calm, in a way that even surprised himself. Maybe the shock just hadn’t kicked in yet, or perhaps it was because, unlike losing the greater part of an arm during Elsa’s attack, this one wasn’t accompanied by gore and pain.

Even though Garfiel lied, it was still mostly true. He had halted the blood, sealed the wounds, and stopped the pain. It’d be expecting too much to think healing magic can heal anything, and he did save Subaru from an otherwise fatal wound just like he said he did.

Subaru: “Was he... upholding some kind of principle or what? I just can’t understand him, that guy.”

He struck Subaru down when he was attacking Roswaal, but afterwards also healed him. And then he thought to imprison Subaru until the end of the Trials to guarantee Emilia's cooperation.

He healed him so he wouldn't die, and even took up the role of caretaker to see it through to the end. Though he loathed the Witch's stench drifting from Subaru's body, it didn't stop him from coming back here. And even though he didn't stop coming, he hadn't asked Subaru a single vital question.

It was almost as though he knew Subaru wouldn't say anything, or as if he already knew everything he needed to know, and so had no interest in what Subaru had to say.

Subaru: "If he does know, does that mean he has a Gospel...? How come everyone is... Or actually, seeing this is the Witch's Experimental Ground, maybe it's only natural."

If every key person possesses a book that tells the future and acts in accordance with its instructions, then shouldn't this world progress in a way that's much simpler for Subaru?

With everyone who is anyone working toward the same outcome, marching towards the same *medetai owari*¹¹¹, for once, couldn't things just play out in a single cozy path?

If there was truly a way to know the future, then it should have saved Subaru a long time ago from having to manually die and repeat and feel his way forward, shouldn't it?

Subaru: "...Complaining isn't going to move things forward at all, and no one's gonna come help me, damnit."

Otto: "That's a depressing thing to say, Natsuki-san. Well, I can't blame you, considering what you just went through... But I am a bit offended by that «no one's gonna help me» part. What did you think I'm doing here?"

Overhearing Subaru mutterings, Otto offered this sympathetic comment before rejecting what Subaru's said at the end. Seeing Otto's smug-looking expression up close, Subaru's face looked blank for a moment,

¹¹¹ English flip. Means "happy ending" (めでたい終わり), originally "ハッピーエンド" (happy end). Same as before.

Subaru: “Ah, come to think of it, what are you doing here? I mean, really, for the last three or four days I’ve had time to think about loads of things, and I’m not exaggerating, but you were basically the only person who never crossed my mind.”

Otto: “You’re unbelievable, you know that!! To think I’d still be surprised you’d say something like that at this point!!”

Subaru: “Honestly though, I’m the one surprised at how your existence just vanished from my head. The moment I saw you I wasn’t even sure if you were Otto or the appa-seller-uncle, you know.”

Otto: “Who’s the appa-seller-uncle!?”

Subaru: “He was kind of a starting point for me. We could also call him *Kanmon-sama*¹¹².”

To date, in terms of Return by Death respawn points, Kadomon was probably the one who showed up the most.

Joking around as he remembered that scar-faced uncle, Subaru put an end to the sense of loss for his right eye and set his mind to analyze the abrupt change in the situation. First, he better get some answers from Otto. And find out his true intentions.

Subaru: “Jokes and all that aside... there’re some things I wanna to ask you.”

Otto: “Well, that’s only to be expected. I’m also pretty interested to know what Natsuki-san did to get locked up in here.”

Subaru: “—? You mean, all this wasn’t on Roswaal’s orders?”

According to Garfiel, Subaru was supposed to be imprisoned for his act of violence against Roswaal. At the same time, his imprisonment was to be used as leverage to compel Emilia to take the Trials. But,

Otto: “I don’t know how much the Margrave is involved in all this. All I know is that right now a terrible rift is dividing the Sanctuary.”

¹¹² English flip. Means "Checkpoint-sama" (関門様), originally "ミスターセーブポイント" (Mister Savepoint).

Subaru: “A rift? What do you mean?”

Otto: “It’s exactly what it sounds like. There’s Ryuzu-sama’s faction, which wants to free the refugees from the village along with Natsuki-san, and there’s the other faction firmly opposed to that. Ever since Natsuki-san got imprisoned by Garfiel, the debate has really gotten out of hand.”

Otto gave a brief summary of what happened over the last few days with an exhausted expression on his face.

Just as Subaru feared, the friction between the refugees and the Sanctuary’s residents deepened, and the mounting displeasure had exploded into small-scaled conflicts. It seemed that the originally small cracks within the Sanctuary had split its population into factions, and the Sanctuary was now in a fractured state.

Swallowing a deep breath at the frightening situation, Subaru followed with “But”,

Subaru: “Why did this happen so suddenly? From what I’ve seen... I mean, I expected...”

In the first world, Subaru was here for over five days without seeing any of this kind of factionalism. In fact, Subaru’s proposal to release the refugees passed easily, and on the morning of the sixth day the agreement was realized.

But this time, the situation was deteriorating way too quickly. Seeing Subaru make this judgement, Otto shook his head and raised a finger, “Well, you see”,

Otto: “It wasn’t sudden at all. In fact, Natsuki-san is one of the main reasons this happened, so if even you think it’s sudden then we’re really in trouble.”

Subaru: “I’m... one of the reasons?”

Otto: “I don’t know what kind of relationship Natsuki-san has with the villagers of Arlam... but it must be a good one. Ever since you got attacked by Garfiel and went missing, the atmosphere in the Sanctuary has become the worst it’s ever been.”

Subaru: “———”

Otto: “To the villagers, Ram-san and the Margrave are in a position where they’d hesitate to voice their concerns to, but because they trust you, that makes you the ideal channel to pass their voices to the top. I’m not saying it’s the only reason, but I think it’s clear how furious everyone is.”

Listening to Otto’s explanation, Subaru opened his mouth without uttering a word.

Certainly, when it comes to the differences in the situation in the Sanctuary between this loop and the previous one, Subaru’s well-being was definitely one of them. But Subaru never once imagined that his presence would have this kind of effect on the Arlam Villagers’ feelings, much less trigger a rift inside the Sanctuary.

Suspiciously squinting his left eye at Otto, Subaru tried to check if he was joking or exaggerating, but Otto just furrowed his brows without showing any notable reaction in particular. In other words, he was probably being serious. Then, the only point of contention would be whether there was something wrong with Otto’s observational skills, but,

Subaru: “I don’t wanna bother piling up arguments to get the answer to that one, so.”

Otto: “Why do I get the feeling I’m being treated improperly somehow. Ah, nevermind. Anyway, Natsuki-san, the reason I came here is related to that rift.”

Subaru: “Related to the rift... So, since things got messed up without me, you’re saying it’ll all return to normal once I go back? Well that’s just, kinda, expecting too much of me and putting way too much *seppaku*¹¹³ on me you know and...”

Bogged down by his own overly low self-esteem, Subaru still couldn’t take Otto’s words seriously. The truth is, even if Subaru had a powerful influence on calming the villager’s hearts, now that everything had already exploded, he doubted there was anything he could do.

In fact, if Subaru showed up now, missing a right eye, he’ll probably just be pouring oil onto the fire. Seeing Subaru shaking his head with a difficult expression, Otto rejected his denial all over again with “No no”,

¹¹³ English flip. Means "pressure" (切迫), originally "プレッシャー" (pressure). Same as before.

Otto: "Of course I don't think Natsuki-san has that kind of influence. That'd just be way too optimistic, you know."

Subaru: "We agree there so I won't protest, but you didn't have to be so blunt about it... So then, why're you getting me out?"

Otto: "I'm sure both the refugees and the residents of the Sanctuary want to avoid a large-scale conflict. So that's why, I've been wondering if Natsuki-san would be willing to play a part in the escape from the Sanctuary."

Subaru: "Play a part... in the escape?"

Subaru narrowed his left eye at the perilous word that flew out, and repeated it under his breath as he ruminated. Then, it suddenly occurred to him what Otto must be thinking.

Subaru looked up at Otto and, "Unless", he licked his lips,

Subaru: "You want to have the villagers to escape while the Sanctuary is in a state of chaos, and you want my help in that escape, is that it?"

Otto: "Precisely, I'm glad the conversation got moving quickly. We're a bit pressed for time, so I hope Natsuki-san can agree to help without any conditions attached."

Subaru: "...Take me through the process first. Even I'm not going to agree to go in without a plan. I need to make sure we got a chance, since we won't have any excuses once we get caught."

Above all, if they roused up the faction opposing the Sanctuary's liberation, it would mean placing Emilia, Roswaal and all the hostages in danger. Not that he really cared what would happen to Roswaal, but Subaru wanted to keep Emilia, Ram, and Patrasche from getting hurt.

Otto: "I would like it if you could add my name to the list of people you don't want to get hurt as well."

Subaru: "It's natural for men to endure pain in the gambling halls. Maybe I'm just that old-fashioned kind of guy. Good men stay out of the house, you know."

Otto: "That's the first time I heard that phrase, but I'm already almost completely sure that's not where it's supposed to be used."

Subaru made a face at Otto's correct guess, and then, clearing his throat, he brought the conversation back on topic,

Subaru: "If it's not just some haphazard desperate gamble, then tell me your plan. After that I'll decide whether to assist you or sell you out."

Otto: "It's pretty scary that selling me out is even on the table... But the plan is straightforward. We've already talked with the moderate faction of the Sanctuary, so while they keep the extremists busy, we'll try to break through the barrier in our dragon carriages. Then, all that's left is to say goodbye."

Subaru: "Isn't that just plain reckless? And who else are you working with...?"

Otto: "That's something I'll tell you once you've agreed to help. But the task we want to leave to Natsuki-san would be persuading the villagers and dealing with the unpredictable Garfiel. After all, if it's between the Natsuki-san and the villagers, he'll probably bite onto Natsuki-san."

Subaru: "My body is pretty good bait, huh. Well, I can't really deny that."

Otto was right. If it was a choice between Subaru and the refugees, no doubt Garfiel will dive straight for Subaru's blood. But, as one would expect, that would mean considerable hardship for Subaru,

Subaru: "So after all that, we still have no idea where Garfiel stands in this, do we? That guy's like family to Ryuzu-san, so he should be with the moderates, but..."

Otto: "Originally, that was how I'd count him as well, but considering his approach to Natsuki-san and Emilia-sama, it's pretty hard to tell. So, even if we don't consider him an active enemy, we have to treat him as a passive enemy. That's the consensus we've come to."

Subaru: "Sounds like your accomplice has a pretty good grasp of the situation...You can count me in. But, just out of curiosity, what would you've done if I refused to help?"

Otto: "We'll go around announcing that you've escaped, and then we won't have to worry about any potential threat from Garfiel for a while."

Subaru: "That's just perfect, you bastards. The moment my hands and feet are freed, you've already got me going against Garfiel! God damnit, I've been played."

Scratching his head, Subaru could only accept that he was thoroughly in the palms of Otto and his accomplice's hands. From the moment he was put into this situation, Subaru had no choice but to dance to their will.

However, Subaru wasn't as upset he claimed.

Because now, by taking part in Otto's plan to free the refugees from the Sanctuary, Subaru might just find the answer to why everyone had vanished from the Sanctuary. If the plan succeeded, it would at least explain how the refugees could have disappeared from the Sanctuary without Subaru's interference. But that still wouldn't solve the rest of the mystery.

Subaru: "It still wouldn't explain how all the residents trapped in the Sanctuary went missing..."

Subaru could accept the conclusion that those who could leave might have left. But that wouldn't explain how the people who supposedly couldn't leave went missing as well. Either way, he would have to leave this place in order to find out what happened.

By following along with Otto's plan, seeing this loop to the end wouldn't be so pointless after all.

Subaru: "Come to think of it, I'm pretty impressed how you managed to find me. Since this place is probably like a secret hideout in the Sanctuary or something."

He had already more or less pieced together the details of the interior of the room from Garfiel's words and the excessive free time. After looking around the place, Subaru clicked the bones in his neck.

Dim crystal lamps served as the only light source inside the room, which had no windows to allow any outside light to enter. Built out of wood, its shoddy construction showed signs of rain leaking through. That was probably the source of the sound of dripping water that had gradually worn at the blindfolded Subaru's nerves. A painful thought.

Otto: "Well, it certainly wouldn't be easy to find his place using any conventional methods. And I'd say it feels more like a secret base than a hideout."

Subaru: "Looking around again, I'm getting that impression too. It doesn't seem to be the handiwork of a pro. It's more like an amateur with too much energy threw a building together based on whatever he felt like."

The rundown little cabin was quite far from Subaru's original impressions of his prison. It was just a narrow, ordinary little shed.

While Subaru was busy going through such sentiments, with "Leaving that aside," Otto gestured to move on with the topic,

Otto: "Finding you was all thanks to me, you know. I believe this is where you give me your most sincere praises, so, what do you think, Natsuki-san?"

Subaru: "I'm honestly impressed, and you really helped me. So how did you find me?"

Otto: "Fufufuuu do you really want to know? You want to know, right? You want to know."

Subaru: "Yeah, I wanna know. You must've used your Divine Protection of the Soul of Language to talk to the bugs and lizards and plants in the forest to gather information to find me here, huh."

Otto: "Yes but can you please give me back my sense of superiority!?"

Otto lamented being destroyed. All the while, having originally intended it as a joke, Subaru couldn't hide his internal astonishment that it was confirmed.

Even though he knew Otto had the Divine Protection of The Soul of Language, he never thought it would have this kind of practical power.

Before, Subaru had followed this Divine Protection while driving Patrasche to save Emilia from danger. That time too, Otto had listened to the bugs and foliage to take one shortcut after another to close the otherwise impossible distance between them.

Subaru: "Really is handy, your Divine Protection."

Otto: "...It's, honestly not that great of a thing."

In front of Subaru's sigh of admiration, Otto's response suddenly became low-spirited. Subaru furrowed his brows at this reaction, but Otto only clenched his fists and did not follow up on it.

Otto: "Anyway, Emilia-sama's Trial will begin soon. Garfiel will be at the Tomb during that time and away from here. Which means now's our chance."

Subaru: “The prep-time before executing the plan is way too short, isn’t it... If you didn’t manage to find me in time, wouldn’t your ass be burning with a schedule like that?”

Whining about how Otto was rushing him, Subaru, who had already agreed to help, gave his body a twist to confirm his physical condition. Although it was nothing to be satisfied with, he had food delivered to his mouth, and his poop cleaned up for him without fail. Thinking about it now, it was rather embarrassing to not even know who had been doing this for him, which kind of reminded him of that time when he was hospitalized for breaking a leg.

Anyway, aside from the creaking, there seemed to be nothing else wrong with his body. Giving Otto, who was watching him, a nod, he set out his step, and—

Subaru: “Uh, can I just ask one last thing?”

Otto: “...What is it now, geez. This is really the last one, ok? If we take too long, the plan will move to the next stage and we’ll just look like a bunch of idiots.”

Subaru: “My bad my bad... But, why did you take such a risk to help me?”

Otto: “———”

As if a bucket of cold water was just splashed on him, Otto’s expression suddenly vanished when he heard Subaru’s question.

That had actually been the first thing Subaru had wanted to ask. No doubt, resolving the conflict between the residents and the refugees would be beneficial to both parties. It was what Subaru wanted too, and would also support Emilia and Roswaal. But,

Subaru: “I don’t see how you’d benefit from all this. I might just be too dumb to see it, but... it really irks me when I don’t know.”

He didn’t want to doubt Otto, but it was true that there was something about this that didn’t feel right. The fact was, Otto had been caught up in the Sanctuary’s problems for no reasons of his own. He was never supposed to be here, nor did he have anything to do with the Royal Selection.

The moment felt these entangled circumstances to be too troublesome, he could have abandoned any involvement and left by himself. Even if he wanted to strike up a relationship with the Margrave and took that as his goal, the current situation was just way too poor to gamble on.

Even if it was not as bad as Subaru, surely, Otto wasn't seeing any light at the end of the tunnel.

That was why Subaru couldn't understand what would make Otto brave such dangers to stand by his side. Just as he said, in the three days he spent in thought, Subaru really had forgotten about Otto's existence. Subaru had found no cause to doubt him. And so, in a sense, one could even say he trusted him.

But now, with the weight all the negative conditions piling up, the only way Subaru could truly trust him was if he could understand what Otto was doing it for.

So, at the risk of overturning that trust, Subaru needed to know Otto's true intentions. If even Otto had a side to him that Subaru could not trust, then that would just have to—

Subaru: "Please answer me, Otto. Why are you going to such lengths to do this?"

He asked quietly. It was a small, but definite watershed.

Stopping his breath, Subaru waited for Otto's answer. And, taking in Subaru's question, Otto gazed back at Subaru in turn, as he chose his words,

Otto: "What kind of person do you think I am, Natsuki-san?"

Subaru: "Someone who'd reach for a penny in front of him while he drops all his belongings on the other hand... I think that's the kind of dopey character I have in mind."

Otto: "That's a terrible way to think of me! Even though I admit I've done something like that before it's still irritating to be thought of like that!!"

That really was Subaru's impression of Otto— Or, rather, it was the impression Subaru wanted to believe.

Protesting against that unacceptable evaluation, "Just, really", Otto gave a tired shake of his head,

Otto: "You know, Natsuki-san."

Subaru: "...Yeah?"

Otto: "—If I just wanted to help a *fhrend*¹¹⁴, would that really be so strange?"

—For a moment, unable to understand what he just heard, Subaru's time stopped.

It was several seconds later when time began to move again. But even as it moved, Subaru still couldn't comprehend the meaning of those words. What did Otto say, just now?

Fhrend? Who's fhrend? Was there someone with that name around here?

Otto: "Wh-what's with that face frozen in surprise all of a sudden!?"

Subaru: "No, I just suddenly heard the name of someone I didn't know so I lost track of what you were saying. Who's this Fhrend-san supposed to be?"

Otto: "I don't know what kind of conclusion you just reached but it's completely wrong from head-to-tail! Not Fhrend, friend! Like good friends!"

Subaru: "Good friends!? Who and who!?"

Otto: "Me! And Natsuki-san!"

Subaru's eyes opened wide, staring at the out-of-breath Otto in disbelief. And Otto, stomping noisily on the floor, flapped his hands up and down, "Are you even listening?",

Otto: "When I was captured by the Witch Cult and my life was in danger, it was Natsuki-san who saved me. And there were all those things you said and did to help me after that. I may have come here in order to meet the Margrave, but that doesn't mean my relationship with Natsuki-san is just one of convenience."

Subaru: "——"

¹¹⁴ Otto completely botches the pronunciation of the word "friend". And with the way Japanese works, Otto could also be saying "If I just wanted to help *Fhrend*", as in, a person named Fhrend.



Illustration from Volume 11, coloring by nikkurai9999 ([source](#))

Otto: “At the end of the day even without these troublesome things, I still think of Natsuki-san as a friend. There may be all sorts of complaints I’d like to raise about my usual treatment, but don’t say such unreasonable, stupid things like we don’t know each other! So—”

Suddenly feeling embarrassed halfway through, Otto quickly scratched his nose and looked away. Subaru remained silent while listening to Otto’s words. And Otto, having reached the end of his speech, stared quizzically at Subaru’s lack of reaction.

There was a visible unease on his face, probably because Subaru hadn’t said anything to confirm what he said just now. It felt like a situation where someone just opened the door to a friendship sales-pitch.

Able to imagine what must be going through Otto’s mind, a certain emotion began to swell up in Subaru’s heart. And, the reaction brought about by that emotion was—

Subaru: “—Pffff.”

Otto: “Yes?”

Subaru: “Whuahahahaha! Fr—friends? We’re good friends! Aaah, is that’right is that’right. Otto, you, you want to be my friend!?”

Otto: “Whaa—!?”

Unable to keep his laughter from blowing out, Subaru boorishly slapped the red-faced Otto on the shoulders. Still couldn’t stop himself, Subaru kept hugging his belly while stomping the floor.

Subaru: “Pffuahahaa, friends. Aaah, damn it. Otto, you bastard, you!”

Otto: “Ow! Ow! What’re you doing!? Yeah, I was stupid for saying it! I get it, Natsuki-san doesn’t see it that way. But even so, I’m pretty sure it’s not something that laughable!”

Subaru: “Nononono, I can’t stop laughing! I’m not laughing at you... My stupidity is too damn much I can’t help but laugh at myself.”

Using his left hand to wipe away the tears from the explosive laughter, Subaru finally managed to get his urge to laugh under control and regained his composure. Then, he looked at Otto before him.

Otto looked like he painfully regretted mentioning the word “friend”. But at this point, the only thing inside Subaru’s heart was appreciation, and inexpressible gratitude.

—What was Otto’s motivation? What could be hidden behind his mask? What could be believed, and what couldn’t be?

Otto called Subaru his friend, and came to help him out of concern. And when he came, Subaru’s first thought was to doubt him rather than believe him, that was just how foolish he was. Thinking that there must be something in it for him, something malicious at play, that was just how petty Subaru was.

Having been tossed around by his circumstances, Subaru had lost sight of the feelings of the people around him, and, believing only in the existence of malice while forgetting the existence unconditional kindness, he had even forgotten what gratitude was.

—Did Natsuki Subaru know so much about the world, that he could just give up and throw it away?

After only these few loops of repeating the world through death, did he imagine that he was now enlightened? All the while, he didn’t even notice he had a true friend at his side.

Unaware of Subaru’s self-admonishment and deprecation, even more confusion floated onto Otto’s face. Seeing this, Subaru managed to form a smile, and suddenly drew in a cheerful breath,

Subaru: “I’m sorry. You are my friend, Otto. —Thank you, for saving me.”

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The building where Garfiel had imprisoned him was secluded deep within the forest, far from the village where the people of the Sanctuary resided. If Otto wasn’t there to guide him, Subaru would have long lost way in the interwoven paths.

Subaru: “Thinking of it that way, we’d be pretty screwed without your Divine Protection, huh.”

Otto: “Please keep your voice down. I don’t know the way either, so I’m trying to rely on the flowers and frogs and lizards right now. If we offend them, they could trick us or guide us off a cliff.”

Subaru: “Nature’s creatures are scary!”

Otto carefully listened as he cautiously chose the path. While Subaru, following behind, ran perilously through the gaps between the trees, trying to get used to seeing with only one eye.

Naturally, it was painful to lose his depth perception and the right half of his vision. The full-on feeling of loss would probably hit him later, on but it was doing its job hindering his movements rather effectively right now.

However, Subaru didn’t feel any resentment towards Garfiel for these injuries.

Considering what he himself had done, Subaru was aware that he had brought it upon himself. Besides, there was always something incomprehensible and contradictory about Garfiel. But Subaru wasn’t ready to settle with that reasoning.

If he just gave his imagination a little more to work with, perhaps he would be able to form an idea of Garfiel.

Subaru: “There’s still too much I don’t know, including whether he has a Gospel or not...”

But he had to shelve that question for now. While he was reluctant to let it go, Subaru made a small sound when a branch grazed his right ear as he struggled to step over the roots. Then,

Otto: “I see it. We’ll come out at the village soon.”

Hearing Otto’s call, Subaru strained his narrow vision to focus ahead. Between the gaps of the trees, through the dark and green, he saw the lights of the village.

Coming out of the forest, at once, the light of the moon and stars shone down from above their heads, as Subaru’s dark field of vision cleared up.

Catching his breath, Subaru looked over his surroundings and confirmed that they had returned to the village of the Sanctuary. Since the time was already night after moonrise, by now, Emilia would have probably started her Trial at the Tomb.

A desire surged up within him, to run there so he could be at her side. But pushing down that emotion once more, Subaru turned back to Otto, and,

Subaru: “If the Trial is happening right now, then this is time to escape. So what are the arrangements, and where are we meeting with our accomplice?”

Otto: “Well, our accomplice—”

Looking up at Subaru’s rapid-fire question, Otto started to point his hand towards the direction of the village. But that movement was interrupted halfway through. And the reason, was a voice.

???: “—There’s no need to worry, I’m already here.”

Cutting into their conversation, a person stepped out with the sound of a footstep.

An extravagant, black maid’s dress. Its white apron, gleaming under the starlight, adorning the lovely girl who still carried some remnants of childishness, like something out of a dream.

Ram: “For now... Well, I’ll just congratulate you on your safe return, Barusu.”

With her peach-colored hair swaying, Otto’s accomplice— Ram, greeted Subaru with her usual refreshing expression, spewing venom.

Arc 4 Chapter 40 - Accomplice

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 11, Chapter 4 “The Value of a Life”, Parts 2 and 4 (first half)

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Complete](#)

A whole variety of words flashed through Subaru’s mind at this sudden, abrupt and unexpected meeting, but—

Subaru: “Is looking like this what you call a «safe return»!?”

Sticking a finger at his right eye—the destroyed organ, Subaru indignantly pointed this out to Ram.

Currently, the whole area around Subaru’s right eye was bandaged with cloth ripped from his sleeve, creating something that might be rather popular with junior high schoolers¹¹⁵. If this one-eyed dragon¹¹⁶ look was just for fashion, it might be something to laugh about later, but since Ram should know what kind of awful state Subaru was in, that reaction was utterly inappropriate.

Hearing Subaru’s objection, Ram slightly tilted her head and gently brushed her peach-colored hair that was swaying with her motion.

Ram: “Sorry, I didn’t pay proper attention to what you usually look like so I can’t tell the difference.”

Subaru: “Well thanks for that devastating remark, but did you know that humanoid lifeforms usually have two eyes, two ears, and two nostrils?”

Ram: “In other words, Barusu is currently not a humanoid lifeform, but instead some random unintelligible lifeform?”

¹¹⁵ Also known as “chuunibyou”.

¹¹⁶ A reference to the famous historical ruler of Japan, Date Masamune. He was iconic for his missing eye, and was often called *Dokuganryuu* (独眼竜), meaning literally “one-eyed dragon”. For more information, see [here](#).

Subaru: “You turned that on its head!?”

Having this usual exchange with Ram, Subaru scanned over his surroundings with his left field of vision. While checking whether there was anyone else lurking in the shadows besides Ram, he was also searching for possible escape routes. Must buy some time and determine where to run.

Subaru: “Otto, on one-two-three we split and run. Your job’ll be shouting and drawing the pursuers’ attention. My job’ll be keeping quiet and slinking away. Any objections?”

Otto: “Yes, lots, but before that, why’re you so wary all of a sudden, Natsuki-san?”

Subaru: “What’re you, stupid? They’re onto us. Just look at that Ram’s eyes. She wants to kill us. No mistake about it. I see those eyes every day at the mansion, trust me.”

Otto: “What is there to trust about a man who’s looked on daily with murderous disdain!?”

Subaru anxiously whispered his escape plan and task-assignments to Otto, but Otto didn’t seem to get the point. Crap. Subaru briefly considered leaving Otto to die and escaping alone, but, remembering their talk about friendship earlier, he couldn’t help but hesitate on the matter.

Subaru: “Damn it, just when I thought I was freed from my cuffs, I got tied down by the fetters of friendship! What d’you want with me...!?”

Otto: “You’re the one who should explain yourself! If you don’t express yourself more clearly, there’s no way for conversation to take place! Also, since the potential for misunderstanding here is incredible, I want you to please do something about that!”

Ram: “If you two could please wrap up your comedy skit, can we move things along? In fact, things are already moving along. We don’t have time for this. This is a waste of time, in other words, a waste of life.”

Faced with the two men trying to push responsibility onto each other, Ram shot them a look of contempt, before taking a step forward and cutting into the main subject. However, Subaru wasn’t entirely joking. In fact, he was quite earnest in trying to drag on the conversation while looking for an escape route. Because,

Subaru: “Honestly, I thought the moment you saw my face you’d try to kill me no questions asked.”

Ram: “If we had met directly after you laid your violence upon Roswaal-sama, it might have turned out that way. But the passage of time has tempered my anger somewhat... Be grateful to Garf.”

Subaru: “Even though it’s thanks to Garfiel that I’m not dead right now, I can’t just change my opinion of someone who did this to my face so easily...”

Still not letting down his guard, Subaru scratched his neck as he replied to Ram. On the other hand, watching him, Ram seemed quite relaxed and without any sense of hostility. At least, she didn’t look like she was going to literally attack him no questions asked. Then the next question on Subaru’s mind would be,

Subaru: “Otto said we’re supposed to meet with someone here, but...”

Ram: “Yes, I know.”

Otto: “Natsuki-san. I know it might be difficult to believe, but the fact is exactly what you see.”

Seeing his roundabout question answered with a nod, Subaru turned to Otto, who gave an identical answer. Crossing his arms and bending his lips, Subaru made a “Hmmmmm”,

Subaru: “If I accept what I see, since you are the one who showed up here, you would be Otto’s accomplice... The person helping the people of Arlam Village escape?”

Ram: “You’re not wrong there. Both Garf and Ryuzu-sama are presently occupied with Emilia-sama’s Trial. With all the major players gathered at the Tomb, now is our only chance.”

Emphasizing that they don’t have much time, Ram laid on the pressure to hurry. But Subaru still couldn’t shake the sense of incongruity. Seeing him hold up his hand to stop her, Ram shot him a silent glare. And, pulling himself together so as not to get crushed by that sharpened gaze, Subaru went on with “Tell me.”,

Subaru: “Why would you be helping with the villagers’ escape? Even if we take a hundred steps back and assume you’re just doing this out of good will, it still makes no sense getting me involved. And just since

when did you become the kind of person who gives up on screwing with me once your anger cools off? The questions are endless.”

Ram: “That is indeed a lot of questions. Verbosity does not make men popular, Barusu.”

Subaru: “That doesn’t sound very convincing when you’ve got a crush on a man even chattier than I am... Answer me, Ram. I can’t imagine a situation where you’d be able to put your grudges aside and work with me. And yet here you are, which could only mean this is...”

Taking a deep breath, Subaru himself was afraid of what he was about to say.

If things were really as Subaru imagined, then his actions here would be—

Firmly closing his eye, he clenched his teeth so as to not let out any noise from his weakness.

Don’t be afraid. Don’t be frightened. Don’t show weakness. Steel your heart and do not waver.

—Right now, it will be fine if he just held back his emotions, didn’t show that he was wavering, and turned himself to steel.

Subaru: “...all on Roswaal’s instructions. That’s the only plausible explanation. But after the violent way I acted towards him, why would he help me? ...You probably know more about that than I do.”

Ram: “...”

Confronted with Subaru’s reasoning, Ram became silent.

But the only image within Subaru’s mind was Roswaal with his Gospel. If he had been in possession of that book of prophecies all this time, then his loyal, devoted confidant, Ram, must have surely known about it.

Of course, she would not know the details. If she really did know all its contents, then that would mean Ram had allowed a future where Rem was left to die.

Subaru: “———”

But that is an impossible supposition. Subaru knew it was nothing more than supposition. When she lost Rem, before there was any special circumstance where she had forgotten Rem's existence, Subaru saw first-hand the older Oni sister's reaction at the loss of her younger sister.

For that reason alone, Subaru was convinced that Ram could not have known of any prophecies where Rem would be left to die.

But then again, just how much was she involved in Roswaal's plots? Roswaal had yet to reveal the full extent of his plans. And Ram, being his closest confidant, just how much did she—

Subaru: "Answer me, Ram. Why are you helping us? If all this is following that bastard Roswaal's scripts, then sorry, Otto and I can take it from here. You won't be needed."

Otto: "Wh— Natsuki-san—!?"

Subaru: "Quiet, Otto. There's no time to explain the details, and I won't be able to guarantee your safety if you knew so I won't tell you, but frankly, this time I am crazy pissed. At least I know I can't hear Roswaal's name and still keep a clear head!"

Touching the bandage over his throbbing right eye, Subaru stomped on the ground as he shouted at Otto for trying to stop him.

The sensation of flying at Roswaal and strangling his slender throat lingered in Subaru's palms. The sensation of the impulse to take another person's life, and of acting upon that impulse, remained present and tactile.

It was accompanied by a raw and grotesque vividness, and now that he had regained his senses, recalling it only brought out the urge to vomit, along with the piercing ringing in his ears and aching of his skull like the memory of a nightmare.

Subaru had no desire to ever repeat that scene again. But,

Subaru: "I know what I did was wrong, but whether I regret it is a different story. He trampled on something I must not permit to be trampled on. And for that I dealt him pain."

Ram: "...By that logic, I doubt Barusu could protest if I chose to exact revenge upon you?"

Subaru: “That’s why I got ready to turn ass and run the moment I saw you. But that ended up in failure because Otto’s a klutz.”

Otto: “Why was I needlessly defamed just now!? And I’ll have you know, if I really turned ass and ran, I’d have disappeared so fast that even Natsuki-san’s ass couldn’t catch up!”

Subaru: “Enough with the asses, is potty humor all you’ve got? Potty-mouth.”

Otto: “I don’t know what that means but I get the feeling I’ve just been horribly slandered! It feels like it!”

Seeing Subaru and Otto descending into their usual banter, Ram cleared her throat and put a stop to that. Subaru resumed narrowing his eye, glaring at her, and, receiving that gaze, Ram spilled out a sigh,

Ram: “...You can relax. This act, at least, is not related to Roswaal-sama’s will.”

Subaru: “Not related... to Roswaal? No, but that means...”

Hearing Ram deny Roswaal’s involvement, Subaru could not conceal his shock.

In that case, it would mean Ram had independently chose to help with the escape. But that wasn’t the only problem.

Subaru: “If Roswaal isn’t involved, then this wasn’t written in the Gospel...? Wait, in that case, just how much is written in the Gospel in the first place?”

Because Subaru flew into a rage immediately after they came to the topic of the Gospel, he hadn’t managed to learn more about the book itself.

However, if this so-called complete Gospel was truly an omnipotent prophetic book capable of describing the entirety of the future, then—

Subaru: “How detailed are the texts recorded inside, and how large does its volume get...?”

If its scope was the entirety of the world, and detailed everything that happened and will ever happen, then the sheer volume of information would surely not fit inside a single book. Besides, the human mind is far too small to comprehend every single event that will happen in this world.

Therefore, Subaru judged that the Gospel would have picked and chose which information about the future it would record in its pages such that it would be within range of what its owner could comprehend.

Subaru: "The contents of Petel-kun's incomplete Gospel were appended one after another... it seems. But I haven't actually seen it happen so I can't be sure."

That fanatic's Gospel, devoid of content in its latter half, seemed to have text appended to the empty pages every time there was a new prophecy.

At least, Subaru was certain that the number of pages had changed from when he first acquired it after defeating Petelgeuse. Later, he had tried to investigate it further, but was incapable of reading the words. Moreover, due to its sinister nature, he had hoped to investigate it in Roswaal's presence, but that was no longer possible under the present situation.

And so, even if Subaru wanted to take this any further, with so little information to sample from, it remained nothing more than empty conjecture. Nonetheless, Subaru did have his doubts about just how reliable and precise the completed Gospel could be.

Seeing this, Ram placed a hand over her lips, as if in thought,

Ram: "...I am not authorized to speak on this matter. And although my presence here is not due to Roswaal-sama's will, the fact that Ram's heart is wholly devoted to him remains unchanged."

Subaru: "That's some head-over-heels overload, get a room, damn it."

Ram: "However..."

Cursing, Subaru lamented that his route for gathering information had been closed off. But, inserting that word, Ram watched Subaru's face rise in surprise, and in a quiet voice,

Ram: "What is certain is that this situation was not written. And it is precisely because it was not written that I am able to be here."

Subaru: "...I don't understand what that means. In the end, what are you trying to do? To help us? And even if you want to help, is that by your own volition?"

Ram: "I will help the evacuation. That is Ram's own intention. Roswaal-sama... now that it has become like this... will not do anything to stop us."

Subaru: "Now that it has become like this?"

Those words bothered Subaru more than just a little, but despite his doubtful prompt, Ram didn't seem to have any intention of answering him. Most likely, the answer was also outside of what she was allowed to say.

Ultimately, Subaru still couldn't find out the precision and nature of Roswaal's Gospel. And all he picked up was the suspicion that perhaps even the complete Gospel could not foresee everything in the future.

Subaru: "Well, even just knowing that might give me some advantage next time I interrogate Roswaal."

Shelving that question for now, Subaru muttered as he forced himself to wrap up the current situation. But even he didn't have any idea what his statement actually meant.

Subaru: "There's still some room for debate whether or not I could believe Ram from the bottom of my heart, but we can worry about that later. I want to check our arrangements first. So, what actually happened?"

Ram: "From the day after Barusu behaved like an idiot, we have been preparing towards today's evacuation. But since the villagers refuse to move without first confirming Barusu's safety, we wound up having to waste time searching for an ambiguously alive Barusu."

Subaru: "Well sorry for not dying in clear black and white... Actually, who're you calling an idiot? Anyway, the day after I acted violently..."

There was something strange about the date that tugged at Subaru, but he couldn't quite put it into words. And, just like this, Ram and Otto gave Subaru a rough explanation of the escape plan. In short, it would be,

Subaru: “Ram has gotten the moderates to open up an escape route, so we’ll escape under the cover of night in the dragon carriages. Otto will lead the way, and my job will be to be the *masukotto*¹¹⁷ who unites the villagers and gets them to leave the Sanctuary without any worries—is that right?”

Otto: “I don’t know what a *masukotto* is, but none of us can evacuate without knowing that Natsuki-san is safe. Well, in the end, I guess Ram-san and I couldn’t gain their trust to lead the evacuation just by ourselves.”

Subaru: “So at a time like this, my fame from the Witchbeast attack actually came in handy, huh. Guess you never know when you’ll be repaid for the things you do, better make sure to set up opportunities to risk my life more often.”

Otto: “As far as I know, somehow Natsuki-san’s been constantly walking the fine line between life and death with the White Whale and the Witch Cult and all, is that actually because you keep looking for that kind of close-call situations?”

Otto muttered in bafflement at Subaru’s remark. And with “Nonono”, Subaru shook his head back and forth in reply,

Subaru: “I have no idea why I get so many opportunities to be exposed to the world’s malice either. Oh by the way, I’ve also walked a thin line with death with an assassin lady who loves opening people’s stomachs and throwing intestine-parties, you know.”

Otto: “Even though there are people who boast about their painful experiences, hearing this from someone who’s passed through this many painful and terrifying situations, it really puts all the other tall-tales to shame.”

Seeing Subaru shoot him a thumbs up, Otto only powerlessly smiled as he gave him a thumbs-up back.

With this, Subaru’s conversation came to an end, and,

Subaru: “Alright then, let’s get to it. Time-wise, how much leeway do you think we have?”

¹¹⁷ Subaru says “mascot” in Katakana (マスコット). Unfortunately, I can’t find a suitable expression for this in English, so I’ll leave it in Romaji.

Ram: "If nothing deviates from usual, it will be approximately two hours before Emilia-sama gives up and comes out of the Tomb. She has probably only just entered the Trial, so conservatively, there should still be about an hour and a half. Even if it takes thirty minutes before departure, we will still have an hour of leeway."

Subaru: "An hour, huh. If we have that, we can at least get beyond the Sanctuary's barrier."

If they could just get beyond the barrier, that would at least eliminate any obstructions from the Sanctuary's side. They would be out of reach of the extremists who don't want the Sanctuary to be liberated, but there was still something else about the barrier that could not be overlooked.

Subaru raised his head, holding a hand to his chin, and, "Ram", he called to the peach-colored-haired girl,

Subaru: "About the barrier, there's still a problem. Once we're through, the extremists won't be able to follow us, but..."

Ram: "Garf, right?"

Subaru: "...You already knew?"

Ram: "He is Frederica's little brother, so I haven't known him for as long as she has. But, although I hate to say this, he is something of an old friend since Roswaal-sama took Ram into his charge seven years ago."

A piece of the information he gathered from the last loop was revealed just like that.

Although he couldn't help but feel somewhat disappointed, Subaru was nonetheless relieved that his understanding was corroborated by a second source. Facing Ram's deadpan expression, he continued,

Subaru: "So what do we do. When he finds out I've escaped from prison, Garfiel will definitely come after us. He's already found me suspicious, and now that I've escaped, I doubt he'll go easy on me this time. Although whether he crosses the barrier will still depend on whether he feels like it."

Ram: “Why are you so sure Garf will pursue us? At least, he respects Ryuzu-sama’s will, so he should be counted as one of the moderates... Even after he imprisoned Barusu, it would at most indicate that he owes no allegiance to either side.”

Subaru: “The reason that guy’s after me... is uh...”

There was a reason why Garfiel hated Subaru to the point of hostility.

No doubt, that reason was the Witch’s Lingering Scent emanating from Subaru’s body.

Picking up this scent, compounding after each Return by Death, Garfiel regarded Subaru with the utmost caution and hostility. And the result of him baring his fangs and acting on that hostility was the current situation. And yet, the fact that Garfiel nevertheless healed and kept the dying Subaru alive only served to show a glimpse of the rational side to his simplicity.

Having reached this conclusion in his head, Subaru wasn’t sure whether he should say it out loud.

It felt like a long time ago by now, but the first person to mention the Witch’s Lingering Scent on Subaru was Rem. From those fragments of Rem’s words, Subaru could sense her strong hatred for the Witch Cult, and that somehow, Ram had something to do with it as well.

In other words, whatever happened with the Witch Cult was not irrelevant to Ram. Just hearing the words “Witch Cult” had made Rem lose her composure. So then just what would this fact mean to Ram?

Ram: “—Barusu?”

Subaru: “Oh, uuhh.”

Ram: “You suddenly went quiet, what’s wrong? Your face is unsightly to begin with, but if you add that oafish incompetence on top of it, there truly is not a single part left worth looking at.”

Subaru: “What’s with that merciless ruthlessness while making that refreshing expression, you! And the reason Garfiel is after me... well, it’s because I attacked Roswaal.”

Looking away, Subaru avoided mentioning the Witch’s Scent. Instead, he cited his scuffle, or, more accurately, his one-sided assault on Roswaal.

Subaru: “If something happens to Roswaal, the functioning of the whole Sanctuary will be affected. I doubt he’ll let me get away after I tried pulling something like that.”

Ram: “...Frankly, that is an overwhelmingly boring excuse, but nevermind. Considering Ram also has matters which I cannot speak of, despite Barusu’s impudence, it would be unfair if I forced you to speak your thoughts.”

Subaru: “You just can’t talk to me without taking a bite out of me, huh? Am I right, Otto?”

Otto: “Uh, I feel like I really can’t accept the fact that Natsuki-san is asking me for validation on this.”

Subaru said this seeking agreement, but Otto only returned a grudging gaze. Pretending not to understand what it meant, Subaru responded with a shrug. Turning her back to the pair’s fruitless banter, Ram looked up to the sky and narrowed her eyes against the moonlight,

Ram: “—A pale moon, a crazed moon. That night, was also a moonlit night like this.”

She whispered in a voice so quiet that it was inaudible.

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—Once it got underway, everything moved along swiftly.

In the first place, even without Subaru, the plans for the evacuation have already been set in motion, and only the final stage required Subaru to act as the trigger.

While the dragon carriages were being prepared, the villagers boarded quickly, and from the assignment of passengers to the cooperation between the drivers, everything proceeded with such smooth coordination that it only took fifteen minutes before they departed, compared to the thirty minutes it was supposed to take. Although, Subaru wasn’t sighing with admiration at the result.

Subaru: “Actually, instead of fifteen minutes, it could’ve been even shorter. Probably five, if...”

With the villagers’ high spirits, it certainly could have been. But what ended up putting a damper on that was none other than Subaru himself.

Returning to the villagers, Subaru had hoped to begin preparations for the evacuation right away, but with him just waltzing in like that, everyone instantly noticed his missing right eye.

The villagers looked like they were about to scream revenge for Subaru's lost eye, but Subaru barely managed to calm them by telling them that the eye wasn't gone but only healing— A lie which they somehow accepted, and only then did the evacuation begin.

Subaru: "Still... It's not a bad feeling to be worried about."

Subaru never thought there would be this many people shocked by his injury, and even after seeing it for himself, he still couldn't quite believe it.

Natsuki Subaru was supposed to be an isolated, alone-to-the-end, insignificant existence incapable of making anyone feel anything. That was what he believed. And yet, before he knew it, there was suddenly so many people willing to feel outrage for his sake.

He was just bragging earlier about his achievements from the trouble with the Witchbeasts, but Subaru hadn't actually done all that much.

It was Rem who saved the children in the forest, and it was also Rem who hunted down most of the Witchbeasts afterwards. Roswaal was the one who annihilated them in the end, and there didn't seem to be a single instant where Subaru did anything of note.

Subaru: "...Ah. So that's why."

Coming to this point, he realized the truth that he had kept bottled up thus far. The Authority of Gluttony had consumed all memories of Rem within this world. Aside from Subaru's memories, where she still remained, only her empty vessel was left in this world.

Aside from that, every trace, evidence, and memory of her had been lost.

So then, what happened to the events that occurred as a consequence of her actions?

—Most likely, all her actions had been attributed to other people, and all the scenes she ever appeared in had been rationalized and rewritten within the memories of those who knew her in the least implausible way.

Subaru: “And everyone Rem had saved... are now turning their gratitude towards her at me.”

Come to think of it, Petra’s unconditional attachment towards Subaru was probably because, to her, Subaru was the one who risked his life to carry her out of the forest. That must be what the incomplete world had forcibly inscribed into her memories.

Otherwise, how could she possibly have such faith in a suspicious looking stranger of unknown origins after having spent only a few days together?

In other words, although unconsciously, Subaru had time and again reaped the rewards of Rem’s actions, as if it were only natural.

Subaru: “...Makes me want to vomit... this idiotic trash I am.”

Spitting out these thoughts, Subaru realized that all the blessings showered upon him were from that sleeping girl’s accomplishments.

That lovely blue-haired girl remained warm within his chest even now. Even forgotten by all the world, perhaps her devotion to Subaru still persisted.

Although, that may just be Subaru’s sentimental and convenient delusion.

Patrasche: “———”

Subaru: “Hm, ahh, don’t worry. I’m fine... You’re also... another good girl wasted on me.”

Patrasche looked back with a worried glance. Taking care not to disturb her mounted master’s thoughts, her movements maintained its fluidity despite her speed. Regardless of her Divine Protection of Wind Evasion, she was galloping with this high awareness in mind.

Subaru hadn’t ridden Patrasche alone like this, without a carriage, since the battles with the White Whale and the Witch Cult, already a week ago.

Perhaps a bit dissatisfied with pulling heavy loads, now released from the burden, Patrasche’s gait seemed especially light while carrying Subaru.

Nevertheless, she was worried when she first saw the one-eyed Subaru, and had used her rough tongue to lick all over his face as though to console him.

While reminiscing on his reunion with Patrasche, Subaru glanced behind him.

It was a secret evacuation of six dragon carriages. Actually, since the creaking of the carriages and commotion of their movements were impossible to conceal, the situation was far from secret. But they still proceeded at the slowest possible speed in order to avoid discovery as best as they could.

Most of the drivers were the merchants hired earlier to evacuate the villagers from the Witch Cult on the promise of payment, who had no business getting mixed up in all this. Subaru had worried that there would be considerable dissatisfaction among them, but seeing them tensely gripping their reins, Subaru realized that his worries were unnecessary.

At least, they were not the kind of people who would let emotion get in the way at critical junctures.

—It was then,

???: “Natsuki-san, Natsuki-san.”

Deep in thought, Subaru suddenly heard a voice calling to him from the leading carriage. Turning towards that voice, he saw Otto, leading the line of carriages, managing his favorite dragon Frufoo while gesturing Subaru over.

Subaru: “What is it? The evacuation is going well, I think.”

Otto: “Mnn, it’s almost going too well. But, we’ve got a problem.”

Lowering his voice, Otto leaned towards Subaru who was riding parallel to his carriage. He covered a hand over his mouth so the dragon carriages behind wouldn’t see,

Otto: “Natsuki-san, please listen carefully.”

Subaru: “Hm?”

Otto: “—The forest is chattering. Something outrageous is coming.”

Hearing this overly vague statement, Subaru could make no other reaction except furrow his brows. But Otto's expression was dead serious as he said this, and the atmosphere was certainly not one to be laughed off. Subaru gulped down a breath, and looked back-and-forth between Otto and the train of carriages behind him.

Subaru: "That something «outrageous», is it coming up to us?"

Otto: "Much of what the trees say are vague and inexact, so I can't be sure. But it might catch up to us at our current speed. So at least we should consider speeding up a bit..."

Otto proposed this with cold sweat appearing on his forehead. Sensing from his ghastly expression that there was definitely something, Subaru decided to signal Patrasche and gave the order for the carriage train to accelerate. At this distance, if they sprinted full-speed towards barrier, then—

???: "—Oy. This many people out for a stroll in the middle of the night n' didn't even think to invite me. Sure feels left out."

Shot out of the air like an arrow, ripping through the silence of the forest, the voice reverberated upon Subaru's eardrums.

Patrasche's feet dug into the ground as she skidded to a stop. The black ground dragon lowered her head and bared her fangs, and once more, she directed her hostility towards her one-time adversary. Seeing the ground dragon poised for battle, the golden-haired youth amusedly twisted his lips into a smile,

Garfiel: "Ha. Still ain't afraid after gettin' that thrashin'? Yer a good girl indeed. Like how «fingers clutch tighter than more than shiny stone sparkles¹¹⁸», yeah?"

Making this proclamation while flashing his bleach-white fangs, the Guardian of the Sanctuary obstructed the path.

As if flaunting the threat of something "outrageous".

¹¹⁸ This expression is similar to the one used in LN ("The more she shines, the farther she is from Magrizza' thing") and Anime ("The brighter it shines, the farther away the Magrizza goes"), as the first half is exactly the same.

JP LN - 光れば光るほどに、マグリッツァは遠ざかる

JP WN - 光れば光るほどに眩む石に指は縮こまる

Arc 4 Chapter 41 - Tiger

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 11, Chapter 4 “The Value of a Life”, Part 4 (second half)

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#)

Presenting a defenseless posture, Garfiel stood there with his arms dangling at his side.

Seeing him blocking the road, Subaru warily scanned his gaze over his surroundings. There could be others lying in ambush.

But still, part of him already knew that if his opponent was Garfiel, no amount of caution would do any good— If he personally came, then he must have come alone.

Sure enough, Subaru couldn't sense anyone else in the vicinity. Confirming that his caution had been unnecessary, Subaru finally let out a sigh and patted the back of the still-wary Patrasche's neck,

Subaru: “I don't care if you wanna suddenly show up out of nowhere, but you mind not flirting with other people's partners right off the bat?”

Garfiel: “I ain't one for lies or pretty words. Just'sayin' whatever comes to mind. I always get scolded by Granny and Ram for that too.”

Hearing the jokes stalling for time, Garfiel clacked his fangs and looked up as his smile gradually disappeared. Receiving that gaze with his single eye, Subaru raised up one finger,

Subaru: “It seems kinda unnatural for you to be here, mind explaining a bit?”

Garfiel: “Ain't no big story behind it. I'm the Fangs of th'Sanctuary, and I ain't gonna let y'run away from the Eyes of th'Sanctuary like that. There y'go. Well, so much for a consolation prize, yeah?”

Seeing Garfiel say this with a light wave of his hand, Subaru furrowed his brows.

If, as Subaru imagined, Eyes was a codename for something similar to ninjas¹¹⁹, then the Eyes Garfiel mentioned probably meant something along the lines of sentinels. But,

Subaru: “I never heard Ram mention there being anything like that in the Sanctuary...”

Garfiel: “Y’think outsiders would know everything there’s t’know about the Sanctuary? There’s a mountain of things even that Roswaal bastard doesn’t know. This is just one of’em, yeah...? Be damned if you knew about’em.”

Seeing Subaru confused by his murky statement, Garfiel relentlessly laid this down. And as Subaru fell speechless, Garfiel snorted and turned his eyes to the line of dragon carriages behind,

Garfiel: “Those there would be all the refugees, yeah?”

Subaru: “Ah, uhh, yeah. Say, Garfiel. I know it was our bad for trying to quietly sneak away and all, but can you just please let us go? After all, it wouldn’t be a bad thing for you either, right?”

Garfiel: “Hah?”

While being stared down by his intimidating gaze, Subaru unconcernedly gestured to the carriages behind him,

Subaru: “Right now, letting the hostages leave is also to avoid the possibility of any further conflict, isn’t it? I heard there’s already small skirmishes sparking up, so before things get out of hand, isn’t it better to deal with it first, once and for all?”

Garfiel: “———”

Subaru: “You and Ryuzu-san both want the Sanctuary to be liberated, right? Nothing good can come from leaving this dangerous spark inside. So, it’s a lot more advantageous to let us leave, isn’t it?”

Quiet and composed, Subaru tried to use all his skills of persuasion on Garfiel. Besides, what Subaru said wasn’t entirely out of convenience. In fact, from Garfiel’s standpoint, letting the refugees leave was indeed the more advantageous choice. Aside from the secrecy of the operation——

¹¹⁹ The Japanese is literally “grass” (草), but also doubles up as an archaic way to refer to ninjas.

Subaru: "I'm not asking you to personally be ok with it, but, considering the circumstances..."

Garfiel: "Oy, it seems there's somethin' yer misunderstandin'."

Subaru: "Misunderstanding?"

Garfiel: "Yer so convinced I'm buttin' in here to stop ya. But it's like y'said, I got no reason to stop th'evacuation. So there's no need wastin' yer breath with all these excuses."

Cutting Subaru off, Garfiel snorted at his presumption. And hearing this reply, Subaru closed his mouth once more. Owing to the bad premonition that preceded Garfiel's appearance, Subaru had indeed let himself run ahead of the conversation. In fact, on a rational level, what Garfiel said was right. But still,

Subaru: "If that's the case, then why're you here...?"

Garfiel: "Just came t'see y'off. If y'guys wanna leave that's yer thing. But leavin' without a representative from the Sanctuary's no different from escapin', ain't it? If I'm here t'watch, th'other guys can't say much 'bout it."

Subaru: "...You've been thinking a lot more than I expected, huh."

Although Garfiel's display of sensibility and intellect was more than a little surprising, Subaru nevertheless accepted his argument. Garfiel, on the other hand, folded his arms and nodded at Subaru's rather impolite comment,

Garfiel: "That's obvious, ain't it? I ain't just strong, I think through all sorts of things... I'm the strongest, after'all."

Subaru: "Ah, I feel a little relieved to hear that. By the way, there's no need to mention my right eye or anything, you know."

Garfiel: "Hah? Ah, 's that right. Y'took off th'blindfold n' found out, huh. Just had to do all th'unnecessary things, y'bastard. Wait, oy!"

Listening to Garfiel's boasting, Subaru stuck a finger at his right eye. And while dealing the issue of Subaru's missing eye, Garfiel suddenly turned his attention to Otto, who had rescued Subaru. Sitting

behind them on the driver's platform of the dragon carriage, Otto shrunk in his neck and slightly tried to hide himself from the razor-sharp glare.

Seeing that wimpy reaction, Garfiel clicked his neck with "Speakin' of which", and continued,

Garfiel: "Yer pretty calm for someone who's just lost an eye, ain't ya? Honestly, I was prepared for some complaints or revenge from ya."

Subaru: "It'll take me till next morning to finish saying all the complaints and we're a bit short on time. And if I try to get revenge, I'll probably just lose my left eye too. So I'll just let sleeping dogs lie."

Garfiel: "What's that supposed t'mean? —Kinda pissin' me off, oy."

Garfiel was a bit dissatisfied with Subaru's reply, but Subaru, sensing no need to continue down this topic, only lightly rubbed his right eye with his palm, and,

Subaru: "So you'll just stand by like this and let everyone return to their village?"

Garfiel: "It's pretty rude to leave without sayin' goodbye, but that's taken care of since I'm here. So do what y'like."

Subaru: "Then, we'll just go ahead and..."

Garfiel: "—Except."

Just as the line of dragon carriages were about to move, Garfiel's voice cut through the air. Slouching down his upper body, Garfiel casted a slanted gaze towards Patrasche and Subaru,

Garfiel: "Not you, you stay. The hostages can go. The noisy lil'bro can go. Ram... Well she can go too if she wants. But not you."

Subaru: "...And why's that?"

Garfiel: "There's Emilia-sama's motivation as well, but most important's to do with you yerself. A bastard stinkin of th'Witch like you, y'think I'd let y'leave just like that?"

Subaru: "That again..."

Giving his nose a flick, the golden-haired youth threatened. Although Subaru was already getting tired of this complaint, he nonetheless nodded,

Subaru: “So the condition is that I stay in the Sanctuary. Can we agree there?”

Garfiel: “Good yer gettin’ it straight off the bat. If it dragged on too long my head’s not gonna bother rememberin’ all that.”

Subaru: “You really just say whatever comes to mind, huh... Alright, I understand. I’ll just go convey this to everyone, wait here.”

Arriving at the main issue, the negotiation came to an end. Although there wasn’t actually much negotiating involved. Subaru simply accepted the terms before turning back to his companions— to relay the information to the drivers, Otto, and Ram.

Subaru: “Basically, as long as I stay behind, he’ll let everyone pass through safely. There’s no point in whining here, so I think we should just accept the proposal...”

Otto: “As much as I want to say that him willing to let us go peacefully is indeed a very good, would those behind us really be ok with it? In the first place, they would’ve stubbornly refused to escape without Natsuki-san.”

Subaru: “Aahh, that’s right, it’ll take quite a bit of effort to convince everyone... But since we’re already on the move, everyone’s probably eager to return to the village. I don’t think me leaving the group partway through will win out against their eagerness to go home.”

In response to Otto’s concerns, Subaru held a hand to his jaw in thought.

In fact, the refugees should be very eager to return home to their village. While Subaru was glad that they would put his safety on the same scale as their desire to go home, at this point, there was no choice but to break that balance.

Otto: “Natsuki-san...”

Subaru: “Well, considering this sentiment, I don’t think it’ll be too difficult to convince them. But it could turn out badly unless I do all the talking. So, I’ll be right back, everyone please get the dragon carriages ready to set out while...”

Ram: “I don’t like it.”

Subaru’s prompt instruction was cut off by Ram’s abrupt interruption.

Slapped by this along with Otto’s concerned gaze, Subaru gave Ram an awkward look, and with “Um...” scratching his head,

Subaru: “Garfiel just said something similar too, but it’s not a good habit to always say these things that shave away at people’s motivation, you know...”

Ram: “Barusu, don’t you realize it yourself? What you said just now.”

Subaru: “What I said?”

Subaru tilted his head at Ram’s words, and couldn’t think of any noteworthy details. Unsure what exactly she was referring to, he furrowed his brows looking confused. Seeing this, Ram let out a disappointed sigh,

Ram: “If you don’t know, then nevermind. It’s just as Roswaal-sama said. Now that it had become like this, no matter what Ram does, it is futile.”

Subaru: “Wait, what the hell are you saying? So you know too, don’t you? You knew, that it would turn out like this...”

Ram: “That is meaningless to Barusu now. Only a waste of time.”

Subaru: “You...”

Subaru ground his teeth watching Ram say this with her head held high with an all-knowing air. And sensing the dangerous atmosphere brewing between the two, with “Wait wait wait!”, Otto stepped between them,

Otto: “Can you two stop arguing? Like Ram-san said, this is a waste of time. Wasting time is the same as wasting the chance to make money. So, can you guys calm down? For me? That’s it, it’s decided, ok!”

Subaru: “Tch. Anyway, I’ll go explain it to everyone.”

Ram: “Tch. Ram has nothing more to say.”

Otto: “Can you two please not click your tongues at me while you speak!?”

As always, Otto dejectedly protested his treatment, but since that was his role, there was not much he could do about it. Nevertheless, it was thanks to Otto’s efforts that things did not break between them. Subaru passed by the dragon carriages one-by-one, and explained Garfiel’s terms.

The Arlam villagers all showed a bitter expression when they heard that Subaru would stay behind, but seeing that Subaru himself was fine with it, and because they had lived as refugees for so long that their desire to return home was overwhelming, they had no choice but to reluctantly accept.

While he was grateful for their reluctance to leave him behind, Subaru finally managed to convince everyone. After returning to tell Ram and Otto, he rode on atop Patrasche to face Garfiel,

Subaru: “We’ve finished our talks. Your condition is fine. So let everyone through.”

Garfiel: “Except you, yeah? They get goin’ then. This ground dragon, she stayin’?”

Subaru: “It’ll be a bit rough on my stamina to have to walk back alone. So I guess Patrasche will have to stay cooped up for a little while longer.”

He placed his hand on his partner, who had to be stuck with the likes of him, and Patrasche gave her body a shake as if saying “You know I don’t mind, geez”, and turned her head away.

Interpreting her movement this way, Subaru lined up beside Garfiel and watched the dragon carriages set out along the path out of the Sanctuary. Seeing the faces of the villagers looking back at him through the dragon carriage windows, Subaru wryly smiled and waved to them in return.

Subaru: “Otto, after you get back to the village, do not go to the mansion. Come back immediately if you can.”

Otto: "...? I don't understand... But, why? I was thinking we'd have to report to Frederica to let her know, right?"

Subaru: "Never... mind. It'll probably be tomorrow morning by the time you return to the village... But just in case, at least don't go there until the afternoon."

Otto showed a confused expression at Subaru's instructions. But Subaru, unable to answer his doubts, only gestured with his chin, signaling him to "Go on ahead".

This was the fifth night—the final deadline, fate's threshold, was the time Elsa would attack the mansion. If things progressed the same way as the first loop, then at this point, no doubt Elsa had already begun her attack.

But no matter how depraved Elsa may be—it was still unlikely that she would descend on the village and massacre its inhabitants. So as long as Otto didn't enter the mansion, he shouldn't be touched by the danger.

Of course, doing this would be none other than abandoning those in the mansion— Frederica, and Petra. And Beatrice, and Rem.

Subaru: "...This time, I'll use everything to find out what happened in the Sanctuary. That's... already decided. If I try to be greedy, I'll only end up with nothing. That's the reason I have stand by and watch, isn't it?"

Emerging in his chest, was the guilt of watching while allowing the worst to happen. Suppressing that guilt with the sense of mission and duty, Subaru spurred on the cruelty of his heart.

Steel. Turn his heart to steel. In order to reach that perfect future, he will use every method at his disposal. Permit, and accept sacrifices along the way, no matter how much it wore down his heart.

Subaru: "As long as we are smiling at the end, I'll... We'll have won."

And so, in the face of sacrifices, all he could do was to hold down the wavering of his heart. He must not hesitate to pave the way so that he would retrieve everything in the end. Regrets were not something that should concern him now.

Subaru: “———”

Having watched all the dragon carriages pass before him and vanish into the forest, Subaru let out a sigh.

Now, there were only the Sanctuary’s residents and people associated with Roswaal’s mansion left behind. All that remained was simply to wait for the dawn and bear witness to whatever was about to happen to the Sanctuary. If he could do that, then this loop’s objective would have been accomplished.

Subaru: “Staying here forever and getting our faces eaten by bugs isn’t the way to go, so how about we go back? It’s starting to get kinda unpleasant with you staring at me like that.”

Garfiel: “Don’t try’ta tell me what to do... Say, y’haven’t asked a peep about Emilia-sama’s Trial tonight.”

Subaru: “The fact that you’re here already answered that, I figured. I’d be lying if I told you I didn’t expect a bleak result this time.”

At least, transforming her worry for Subaru and the hostages into motivation wasn’t going to work. If Emilia was to prevail against the Trials, something fundamental would have to change. Otherwise, chances are that none of the Sanctuary’s problems could be resolved in these rushed circumstances.

Subaru: “That’s why I have to see this through to the end. I can’t just wait for Emilia to pass her Trials without finding out what’ll happen next.”

So that he will not repeat his mistake, Subaru will take the risk of staying on in this third world.

The highest number of times Subaru has died in a single series of loops was four. If he intended to break through in the fifth world, he had only one more death after this.

Subaru: “There’s still a mountain of things I need to confirm...”

—He was already thinking of his own death as a foothold to reach that breakthrough.

Not even Subaru himself noticed just how twisted his own statement was. He signaled to Patrasche to return to the Sanctuary, and Garfiel, watching him from behind, muttered,

Garfiel: “...Talkin’ like y’understand everythin’. Just the fuck y’think y’know?”

Subaru: “Garfiel?”

Unable to hear that whispered question, Subaru turned around on his saddle. And abruptly, in front of his eyes—

Garfiel leapt towards Subaru atop Patrasche’s back, his palm slashing towards Subaru’s neck like a blade.

The sight of fingers shredding the very air burning into the back of his eyes, Subaru’s voice died in astonishment at the unreal and sudden approach of death. It was not that he never considered the possibility of Garfiel’s attack, but he never thought it would come so directly in this place.

Subaru: “———!”

The shrill whistle of a swinging blade was followed by the pain of tearing flesh striking Subaru accompanied by the spray of blood. Reflexively holding his shrieking throat with his hand, he felt a thin crevice beneath his voice box that had been gouged out by the claw.

Pressing with his palm while feeling the blood seeping through his fingers, Subaru hurriedly grasped the reins and signaled Patrasche,

Subaru: “Garfiel! What’re y...!”

Garfiel: “Y’re gonna get in the way? What y’think yer doing, huh?”

While Subaru screamed from Patrasche’s back at the sudden attack, Garfiel, landing on the ground, directed his rage and bloodied fingers at an entirely different direction.

Subaru, his face contorted in pain, turned to look in the direction Garfiel was pointing, and saw a single girl standing with a wand in her hand— Ram, with her peach-colored hair swaying, and her stern gaze fixed on Garfiel.

Subaru: “Ram!?”

Ram: “I had a bad feeling, so I stayed, and it turned out exactly as I thought. Barusu, you better thank me that your head is still connected to your torso.”

Garfiel: “Without that wind screwin’ up the aim, it would’ve lopped that head flyin’.”

Hearing the uninvited Ram's remark, Garfiel shook his head in acknowledgement. Speechless at their exchange, the pain of the wound only further inflamed Subaru's thoughts,

Subaru: "What the... hell are you doing, Garfiel!? Were you trying to kill me just now!?"

Garfiel: "An' failed. If yer askin' what I was tryin' to do, dunno know how else t'answer ya."

Garfiel plainly confirmed his intention to kill. Hearing this, Subaru's single eye opened wide as his lips trembled at the incomprehensible act. Since,

Subaru: "If that's the case, couldn't you have killed me anytime you wanted? When I was imprisoned, no, even before that, if you just didn't heal me, wouldn't I have already died!?"

Garfiel: "If I did that, the hostages would've exploded. Now that they've left, everythin's ready fer me t'kill ya, ain't it?"

Subaru: "That's...!"

Feeling his thoughts being dyed pure red, Subaru was struck dumb by Garfiel's words.

All along, Garfiel had him in his sights and was looking a way to dispose of him without the problems that came with it, and sending away the hostages played right into his lap. Yet, there was still something else that felt unnatural. That is—

Subaru: "If you kill me here, what happens to Emilia's Trials? Not trying to be narcissistic here, but if I'm her primary motivation, when I'm dead, doesn't that mean the Trials will never end?"

For Ryuzu's faction, which hoped to liberate the Sanctuary, there could be no situation worse than this.

Even if Garfiel suspected Subaru because of the Witch's stench, there was no way he could have overlooked such a major factor.

Although his actions could perhaps be attributed to blind rage, seeing him conversing just now, none of his calm and rational demeanor fit the description of someone who had lost themselves to rage. In other words, Garfiel's attack just now was the result of cold calculation. Just what did it mean—

Garfiel: "I..."

Ram: “No point listening to excuses, and it’ll be meaningless trying to persuade him, Barusu.”

But, just as Garfiel began to speak, Ram sharply cut herself between them. Turning her wand towards Garfiel, who clicked his tongue,

Ram: “You should stop trying to hide your true intentions with logic, Garf. It isn’t like you.”

Subaru: “O—oy, Ram.”

Ram: “Stand down, I’m speaking— Either way, Garf has already made up his mind to kill you, Barusu.”

Hearing Ram confirm Garfiel’s murderous intent, Subaru could only close his mouth.

Ram slowly approached Subaru while keeping her vigilant glare fixed on Garfiel, and, holding out her hand, she softly traced her fingers over the underside of Patrasche’s neck.

Ram: “Good girl. Do what you must do now. That master of yours on your back... is incredibly dull, both to himself and to others.”

Patrasche: “———”

Calmly, and somewhat gently, Ram said this to Patrasche, who replied without words. Patrasche extended out her tongue and licked Ram’s fingers in response, before lowering her head and setting out her steps in the direction of the woods, regardless of Subaru’s commands,

Subaru: “W—wait. You two, what’re you...”

Ram: “Don’t let go of the reins. As long as you do that, your ground dragon will do everything in her power to protect you, Barusu. You are as fortunate as a man can be.”

Subaru: “Listen to me! No, tell me why! What do you know that’s making you do this!?”

Ram: “There’s no time to explain, and explaining is futile. Do as I say, Barusu— Ram can buy you about a minute, use that time to get however far you can. This is the only resistance Ram could offer for you.”

He couldn’t understand the meaning of the last part of Ram’s reply, but there was already no time to ask.

After hearing her last syllable, Patrasche speeded away with a small neigh. And, shaking around on the ground dragon's back, Subaru felt the Divine Protection of Wind Evasion coming into effect as they were swallowed up by the flock of trees.

Subaru: "Ram——!"

He screamed. But there was no answer.

As his vision became obscured by the forest, all Subaru could do was to bite his lip and be carried along on his involuntary flight.

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After Subaru and Patrasche sped into the forest, the two were left facing each other without anything to stand between them. Seeing Ram holding her wand readied and unflinching, Garfiel stuck a finger towards the forest where Subaru had vanished, and,

Garfiel: "Y'just had t'say those unnecessary things. Gonna be a pain in the ass chasin' him now."

Ram: "You think I will let you leave?"

Garfiel: "Y'think y'can stop me? It'd be a huge mistake if y'think th'balance between us hasn't changed since the old days. And don't think I'll go easy just because I like ya."

Cracking his knuckles, Garfiel threatened once more. But he knew full well that this was not a girl who could be intimidated. In fact, Ram didn't seem affected at all. Garfiel roughly scratched at his spiky blond hair,

Garfiel: "Ram, what're y'doin'? What's th'point? If there's a point I ain't heard about it. Y'doin this on Roswaal's orders?"

Ram: "...Sorry, Garf. It is Ram's own will to be here. It has nothing to do with Roswaal-sama's orders. At least, I see no need to ask Roswaal-sama's instructions at this point."

Hearing Ram say this resolutely, Garfiel, who was beginning to have the same doubts that Subaru had earlier, furrowed his brows with the exact same confusion at her answer. Looking at her with an increasingly bitter expression,

Garfiel: “I don’t get it, Ram. I’m gettin’ it even less now that it ain’t on Roswaal’s orders, I can’t think of a single reason why y’be doin’ this.”

Ram: “Really?”

Garfiel: “Uh—?”

Ram: “Do you really not understand... why Ram is doing this, Garf?”

Asking calmly, Ram’s expression and tone were no different than usual. But, listening, Garfiel’s expression changed under her gaze.

Confusion. Doubt. Shock. And wrath.

Garfiel: “You...”

Taking one step forward, Garfiel’s heel ravaged the ground beneath it. Gnawing his fangs in an expression of unbearable rage, he narrowed his eyes towards Ram,

Garfiel: “I don’t fuck’n believe it. You’d do somethin’ like this...”

Ram: “—For Frederica, and for you, Garf.”

Garfiel: “Don’t ya bring up the name of that traitor!!”

Roaring, Garfiel stamped down his foot sending the ground caving in, and, with a boom, the surface shattered beneath his foot.

Plumes of smoke billowed out as the nearby trees tilted from the force. The forest cowered in fear, and the air was silenced in terror of his rage.

Yet, in the face of that wrath, Ram’s expression remained cool and unfazed,

Ram: “Do you think anyone will agree with you when you throw tantrums like an obstinate child? Garf, how long are you going to keep running in circles in this narrow forest?”

Garfiel: “Don’t y’talk like y’know everything! You... You n’Frederica, who abandoned the Sanctuary, what could y’know, ahh!?”

Ram’s words, like she was chiding a small child, did not reach the enraged Garfiel in the end. But unlike the way he stomped into the ground before, this time, he only kicked at the earth without force.

Garfiel: “For me? It’s for me? You... That’s exactly what I can’t believe. Now it’s already come t’this, how dare y’tell me that...?”

Ram: “Garf...”

Garfiel: “Did I ask for yer sympathy? Don’t look down at me all high n’mighty. Me, Granny, or the others, we never asked for your pity.”

Covering his face with his palm, his breathing ragged, Garfiel wrenched out these words.

A figure that seemed almost tragic, and slouching made its stature appear even smaller than it was. Taking deep breath after deep breath, Garfiel took his hand off his face, and,

Garfiel: “Enough. I ain’t listenin’ no more. Turn back to th’Sanctuary now. Do it and I’ll forget this. I still gotta go chase down that bastard.”

Ram: “I refuse, Garf. If anyone should concede, it is you. Even if I go back, the approaching ruin is unavoidable. You understand this as well, don’t you?”

Garfiel: “Just go back. I ain’t askin’ again. Go back and stay there till the Trials’ over.”

Ram: “No, I will not return or wait. Nothing can come from standing idle. By stagnating in this place, the only thing that will remain in your palms will be ashes of what you hoped to achieve. For something so weak and vague, why do y...”

Garfiel: “Even so! It’s a lot better than having nothing left!”

Cutting Ram off, Garfiel looked up and barked. Etched into his expression was at once rage, jealousy, and sorrow.

Garfiel: “Ruin? So what? Long as I’m here I’ll take care of it. This time, all of it, I’ll take care of all of it...”

Ram: “Garf, haven’t I always told you? —That’s nothing more than compensatory behavior.”

In the face of Garfiel’s detonated emotions, Ram still responded with single-minded calmness.

In direct opposition and impossible to converge, neither were willing to concede, and no compromise was coming. Perhaps realizing this, Garfiel looked down and closed his eyes,

Garfiel: “Go back, Ram. This is... my final request. With all the feelings I have ever expressed for you, please. So...”

Ram: “Then, Garf. —Will you abandon everything except for Ram?”

Garfiel: “———”

To Garfiel’s final, grief-filled plea, Ram’s reply was concise and crisp. Although, carried within it was something excruciating that pressed on the hearts of anyone who heard it.

Standing opposite her, Garfiel’s expression stiffened and his lips trembled. Seeing this, Ram lightly cast down her eyes,

Ram: “Choose Ram over all the things in this world, see only Ram, love only Ram, do everything only for Ram, be loved only by Ram, forgive only Ram, and devote your entire being to Ram— Can you do this?”

Garfiel: “I—I...”

Ram: “Ram, can do this.”

Placing a hand on her chest, Ram proclaimed to the stuttering Garfiel.

A quiet and unwavering will, alone filled her words as she lifted her face,

Ram: “—Ram, can do this.”

And that, was Ram's final ultimatum to Garfiel.

Perhaps understanding this, for only an instant, all dominance vanished from Garfiel's face. Only Ram was there to witness just what expression adorned his face in that instant.

Then, quickly shaking his head, and stowing all his exposed weakness deep within himself, he bared his fangs,

Garfiel: "I've always known... just how stubborn y'are."

Ram: "I could say the same to you. —If I cannot truly be the most important thing to you, then Ram will not yield to you, Garf. Ram will not belong to anyone."

Garfiel: "Is that, so."

Facing each other, their gazes met.

Conclusions drawn, they acknowledged that neither would back down. Then, both, in a quiet voice,

Ram: "Farewell, Garf."

Garfiel: "Goodbye, Ram."

They exchanged these final words between them, full of affection.

—The forest trembled.

And a roar echoed out.

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Subaru: "Patrasche! Stop! I'm telling you to stop!"

Desperately pulling on the reins, Subaru frantically screamed to Patrasche as they galloped through the forest.

But the ground dragon had no intention of listening to her rider, and only single-mindedly sprinted along the rugged road, distancing them from the firing-line behind them.

Although Subaru had heard of panicked horses that would refuse to listen to their rider's commands, this didn't seem to be the case with Patrasche.

The ground dragon seemed no different from usual and was consciously ignoring his commands.

In other words, she must have deemed Subaru's commands unworthy of her obedience.

Subaru: "You are ignoring me... for my own good, aren't you?"

Patrasche: "———"

While she would not listen to his commands, she did not simply throw her master off like she was pissed off, either. Every bit of Patrasche's behavior had been overflowing with concern for Subaru, and Subaru, being tossed around on her back, was close to tears in gratitude and shame.

It was not simply because his ground dragon refused to obey him. He was disgusted with his own stupidity for failing to notice that even his ground dragon was worried about him.

And, alongside this, the matter that was still fueling Subaru's self-despair in present continuous tense, was that,

Subaru: "But Ram's in danger! I don't want to believe that Garfiel will really do anything to hurt her... but now...!"

Garfiel had made up his mind to kill Subaru. It was outside of his calculations that Ram would stand in his way, but now, just how would he rectify this miscalculation— That was too frightening to imagine.

Unable to save those at the mansion, Subaru had already more or less come to terms with their sacrifice in this loop. But those terms did not include Ram. Completely unprepared to allow a further loss beyond his permitted range, it tore Subaru's heart to pieces, resulting in this miserable state.

Subaru: "I hate... getting hurt too, but I can recover. So...!"

Pleading, his voice was almost crying. But Patrasche still ignored him.

With speed like the wind, the ground dragon did not slow down, and had no intention of listening to Subaru's appeals. Ram and Garfiel were now far behind them. A tragedy unfolding in a place he could not reach.

The thought battered at Subaru's heart. Why was his heart so weak, and why could it never be strong?

—And, this way, with his sights directed only into himself, repeating mistake after mistake, Subaru was bound to repeat the same failure.

Subaru: “—Eh?”

Suddenly, his line of sight expanded as Patrasche broke through the tangled woods. Clinging tight onto her as they cleared the obstructed path, Subaru's jaw dropped at the scene that opened before him.

Otto: “Wh—what happened, Natsuki-san? You're back in such a hurry?”

The one who asked was Otto, looking just as stumped as Subaru.

It was the train of refugees that was supposed to have gone ahead. Somehow, Subaru had bumped right into the side of their column. He thought they had just been fleeing aimlessly through the forest, but Patrasche's behavior certainly exceeded his expectations.

Otto: “I thought he didn't let you leave? What happened to Garfiel?”

Subaru: “I-I don't really know either... But Ram and Patrasche...”

Trying to control his ragged breathing so he could speak to Otto, Subaru wiped the sweat from his brows with the back of his hand.

—In the next instant, an atrocious roar shook through the forest.

Subaru: “Wha—!?”

Otto: “Huh!?”

Throats frozen, eyes widened in shock, Subaru and Otto simultaneously startled and turned to the direction of the voice.

The thunderous roar shook the atmosphere and the hearts of men alike, and even the ground dragons showed signs of panic at its overwhelming force.

If there was a single creature unshaken by this scene, it was Patrasche, bearing Subaru on her back.

Thus, she was the first to judge the situation and react.

Otto: “Ah, Natsuki-san!?”

Subaru: “Hey, Patrasche!”

Immediately turning her head to the front of the line of carriages, Patrasche broke into a run. She headed towards the leading carriage— and then further beyond that, sprinting without hesitation towards the Sanctuary’s exit, at end of the road ahead.

Leaving Otto’s call behind, Subaru felt the Divine Protection activate once again. He didn’t know the reason behind her action, but just as he was about to raise his voice to stop her,

???: “———!!”

An impact shook the ground, and Subaru heard a shriek coming from behind. Involuntarily holding his breath and turning back his head, he gazed in the direction of Otto and the others.

In the left half of his vision, Subaru saw the scene that unraveled in the darkness of the forest.

Carriages sent flying. Ground dragons swallowed along in the impact, and passengers scattering into the air in screams and blood, dying the forest sky red.

Subaru: “—Ah.”

Witnessing this devastation, Subaru saw, under the airborne carcasses of the dragon carriages, a beast.

—Its whole body covered in golden fur, a gigantic tiger emerged in Subaru’s sight.



Illustration from Volume 11, coloring by Setowi ([source](#))

Arc 4 Chapter 42 - Value of a Life

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 11, Chapter 4 “The Value of a Life”, Part 5

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

—The fierce, golden tiger stooped low, and glowered over its surroundings with its razor-sharp gaze.

The great tiger was about four meters in length, a four-legged beast boasting a body over twice the size of the lions and tigers Subaru knew.

With lumbering legs and its mouth unable to close in its long, protruding fangs, the beast flaunted its blood-drenched daggers to-and-fro.

Subaru: “Wh... at...”

...is that? But before he could finish the question, the airborne carriages crashed to the ground. The sound of destruction echoed, splinters of wood scattered, and shrieks saturated the air.

The passengers swallowed by the impact were thrown to the ground, those conscious wailing in pain, while those unconscious lay motionless in their own puddling blood.

—That instant, Subaru was struck with the thought “I have to help the wounded”.

But before he could turn that thought into action, an intense movement swept Subaru along.

Swinging around, ignoring Subaru’s astonished cry, Patrasche scraped her foot into the ground and dashed away from the beast, aiming straight for the forest.

Subaru: “Wai—! Hey, Patrasche!?”

Subaru shouted to the dragon that was ignoring her rider, but, just like on the way here, Patrasche showed no intention of obeying his will.

Leaving behind Otto and the others, who had been stunned into motionlessness, Patrasche accelerated, bearing Subaru on her back. But,

Beast: “———Wrr!!”

With a thunderous bellow, as if slicing through the forest, the beast hounded Subaru’s trail.

A torrent of bestial rage and hostility pierced down the road such that as much as Patrasche tried to get away, her instincts froze her still.

The petrifying sensation of a mighty existence possessing life-threatening power making him the focal point of its hostility. Taking in this feeling he had felt many times before, terror and dread coursed up Subaru’s spine. And precisely because he knew this feeling well, he could not blame the frozen Patrasche for stopping her steps in such a time and place. He could not blame her, but the consequence was clear.

Subaru: “——Ah.”

Turning around, the devastation at the root of his terror flowed into his sight.

From light swings of the beast’s paws, dragon carriages were sent tumbling like toy boxes as their contents scattered and struck upon the trees of the forest. Perhaps, if one amplified the sound of chopsticks snapping by a hundredfold, it would be something resembling this sound of wood and human bones shattering against one another.

Faced with a literal monster, despite knowing that inaction was the same as waiting for death, no one moved from their spot.

Perhaps, they were afraid that any movement might excite the great beast to turn its claws, its fangs, and its wrath towards them. Although, they instinctively knew that doing so would only be shifting around the order of their doom.

Subaru: “Is that thing... the reason why there was no one in the Sanctuary...?”

Trembling from the roots of his teeth on the petrified dragon’s back, Subaru burned the murdering beast into the back of his eye with the resolve of certain death.

Coated in beautiful golden fur, its face possessed at once savagery and dauntless dignity. Its keen eyes were brilliant with hostility and rage, and its rattling fangs were too sharp to be likened to mere blades— This could very well be the thing that attacked the Sanctuary.

Subaru: “—Huh?”

Intently watching without missing a single gesture, expression, or movement, Subaru noticed something out of place about the beast that was slowly approaching. Squinting his single eye in search of the cause of that incongruity, he noticed it.

—Something was sticking out of the left side of the great tiger’s back.

To the enormous beast with seemingly limitless physical strength, the damage must have been trifling. From its movements as it walked, it didn’t seem to be even aware of the wound, and must have considered it as nothing but a scratch.

Yet, for Subaru, it possessed great meaning. Not the wound itself, but the familiar-looking object that inflicted it.

—It was Ram’s favorite wand that should still be in her hand.

The small casting-wand that Ram used for chanting magic. At least, Subaru had never seen her use any other medium for spellcasting. Just now, she was wielding it in her hand in her stand-off against Garfiel. There was no mistaking it.

There was no way he could be mistaken. But why was it jutting out of the great tiger’s back? The answer—

Subaru: “Ata... vism...”

Suddenly, a scene from before flashed across Subaru’s mind.

It was the day Garfiel showed him a fragment of his lineage, the special quality of his physical body. That time, he had only fully beastified a section of his arm as a demonstration of the demi-human part of his lineage, but,

Subaru: “If he’s that were-tiger, then...”

If that murderous beast was the fully beastified Garfiel...

...then that would explain why Ram, who had stayed behind to delay him, drove her wand into the tiger's body. Yet, at the same time, it also meant that—

—Ram, having lost her wand, failed to stop the tiger-morphed Garfiel in the end.

Subaru: “Garfiel, you... What did you do to Ram?”

Beast: “———”

Subaru: “Answer me! Ay! What did you do to Ram!? Garfiel!!!”

The monster's face scowled at Subaru's call, without answering.

Only, as if irritated by Subaru's voice, it shook its lumbering head and waved up its paw, revealing the tip of its claw. At the end of its claw, there dangled a strip of a familiar-looking black fabric. Seeing this alone, Subaru understood the fate of that peach-color haired girl.

Subaru: “GARFIIIEEELLLLLLLLLLLL!!!!”

Screaming, abandoned to rage, Subaru let go of the reins and flew down from Patrasche's back. Landing miserably, he rolled to the ground, and, climbing onto all fours, he glared in front of him.

Both on all four limbs, man and beast faced one another at a distance. The gap in strength was obvious, and without a single hair's chance of victory, there was already no room for negotiation between them.

Subaru: “You, despise me that much...?”

Beast: “———”

Subaru: “You, hate me that much...?”

Beast: “———”

Subaru: “If you really! Wanted! To kill me!! YOU ONLY HAD TO TARGET ME!!!”

Beast: “———Wrrr!!”

Answering Subaru's enraged scream, the beast roared into the sky. The atmosphere pulsed, the forest recoiled, the leaves shuddered, and all living things cowered, overtaken by dread. But Subaru alone, unfazed, bared his teeth.

Subaru: "You'd even lay hands on the girl you loved... What Fangs of the Sanctuary, don't make me fucking laugh!!"

Beast: "-----WRRRR!!"

The next moment, in answer to Subaru's insult, the enormous tiger charged. With overwhelming momentum, the wreckages of dragon carriages between them were blown into the air as the beast advanced through the mist of splinters and blood.

Incredible velocity, and enormous mass. Direct impact would be akin to being struck by a large truck—Instant death without even the time to gasp.

Imminent death was before him. Sensing its inevitability, Subaru's mind turned with unprecedented speed. Tapping into rage, his brain cells ignited in an explosion of emotion.

A certain darkness loomed within his chest, and following his bloodstream, it coursed throughout his body. Hot, black, dark, faint, murky, and immaterial, that horrible something— could be grasped.

His single eye flying open, Subaru felt the sensation of having grasped onto something within himself.

He looked in front of him. At a distance close enough to feel each other's breaths, the beast's fangs were upon him. With reflex transcending the physical limits of his body, Subaru saw, at the back of the beast's opened mouth, its red and black esophagus, an entrance towards death. In that instant, Subaru raised up his arm and placed it between the fangs and his chest.

Beast: "-----!?"

Suddenly, with a swirl of wind, the body of the great beast vanished before Subaru's eyes.

No, more accurately, it was not that it vanished. But, from sheer momentum, with its head as the pivot, the great tiger was flung into a 180-degree arc into the air. Just like this, it landed with its back crashing

to the ground, barking in pain and incomprehension as its enormous mass bounced off the surface, rocking the earth with its impact as it tumbled.

Subaru: “Wh...!?”

Turning around, Subaru watched in disbelief as the fierce tiger rolled across the ground. Just now, Subaru was certain that he would lose his life.

The beast seemed just as shocked. Lying sideways on the ground, its face told of utter confusion as it slowly pushed itself off the surface, but owing to the impact to its semicircular canals, it collapsed to the ground once more.

Neither understanding what had happened, they looked at each other, panting. But Subaru, feeling a sudden fatigue surging through his body, fell to the ground, while the great tiger stood up with a frustrated shake of his head.

Once again, which side had the advantage was as clear as day. Even now, Subaru had no idea what had happened, but—

Subaru: “If it responded to my taunt like this... there’s no doubt it’s Garfiel.”

Forcing his trembling arms to push his body upright, Subaru sank his teeth into his lip to keep himself conscious. In front of him, the giant beast cautiously shifted its body left and right, most likely trying to fathom the incomprehensible phenomenon behind that momentary exchange.

Still, Subaru wasn’t sure if he could bring that mysterious sensation out again, even if he tried. He managed to land one on him, but none of it had felt real.

His opponent’s caution was almost comical, but without any reason to laugh, Subaru himself was just as ridiculous.

Step-by-step, the giant beast approached warily, still half-doubtful of Subaru’s inaction, but then, it abruptly stopped, and—

Beast: “———WRRR!!”

Subaru: “Ah.”

A roar.

Feeling the illusion of being bathed in the winds of a great storm, Subaru covered his face and his body instinctively contracted. Cutting through the gaps of his petrified nerves, was the sound of steps stamping into the earth.

Shattering the ground, the beast's body leaped into the air, throwing itself directly at Subaru.

Its mass, its claws, neither was avoidable. This time, the sensation from before did not emerge on the tips of his fingers. It's the end. The end is coming. And,

Patrasche: "-----!!"

Beast: "-----WR!?"

Thrusting in from the side, Patrasche rammed her head into the great beast's stomach.

The great tiger let out a painful wail as the impact bent its body into a V, choking the air from its lungs. Then, swinging her body, Patrasche slammed her tail into the tiger's eyes, temporarily robbing it of its vision.

Immediately turning around, Patrasche picked up Subaru with her mouth and attempted once more to escape into the wind---

Subaru: "Patra--"

His call was interrupted by a sound of tearing flesh.

Dangling by his waist from Patrasche's mouth, Subaru was suddenly thrown into the ground ahead. When he looked back, Subaru saw that Patrasche's tail was caught in the great beast's fangs. Her body which weighed over 400 kilograms was being flailed about like a paper toy.

Patrasche screeched in pain. Her flesh ripped as blood sprayed out, and the instant her tail was severed from its root, blood spouted down, dyeing half of Subaru in red.

Helplessly tossed into the air, Patrasche tumbled to the ground. Witnessing her wretched state, with panting breaths, Subaru turned and glared at the giant tiger.

Harboring utmost hatred in his single eye, Subaru faced down the enemy whom he once might have called friend,

Subaru: “GARFIIIIIEEEELLLLLL...!”

With only single-minded hostility, he called to that name.

There was no answer. Perhaps beastification had robbed it of its human vocal organ. For within the mighty tiger’s throat as it extended out its paw, there was no hatred, or murder, or any words, for that matter.

There was only instinct transformed into action.

—To snap his neck, or to crush his head in its jaw.

No matter what kind of pain, or how wretched his end, Subaru was ready to accept death.

He would swallow down all the suffering, make it his food, and turn it into his reason to obtain that perfect future.

Subaru: “You think you’ll be around in that future...?”

With his gaze fixed on the steadily approaching claw, Subaru conveyed his hateful final words.

And then, closing his left eye, he shut his sight into darkness. Left with only the regret of Patrasche’s sacrifice, and his inability to save her—

Subaru: “———?”

Although Subaru was ready to accept the coming end, its visit did not come. Surprised, he furrowed his brows as irritation began to rise at the tardiness of the arrival of death. Finally, he opened his eye,

Subaru: “Ah?”

In front of him, behind the sharp claw that was supposed to have ripped Subaru to shreds, he saw the expression on the beast’s face. The reason Subaru’s throat let out a stupid groan, was because the beast’s

face, the face that was supposed to be pouring all its bloodlust onto Subaru, was instead turned towards a completely different direction.

The great beast had taken its gaze off of Subaru, and was instead looking towards something to Subaru's left. Turning to follow its gaze, Subaru saw something fly over and bounce off the beast before rolling onto the ground— A rock.

Completely ordinary, it was just a rock about the size that would fit in the palm of a hand. Tracing back the course of the projectile, he saw the silhouette of a person standing at the edge of the tree line.

With short hair, a skinny face, and scrawny limbs, it was a man with no distinctive or noteworthy qualities whatsoever, but Subaru knew him.

He was one of Arlam's villagers, a member of the youth militia, one of the refugees who had taken refuge in the Sanctuary, someone who was aboard one of the toppled carriages, and now, he was there, staggering with blood flowing down his forehead.

Sluggishly, he bent down, picked up the nearest rock, and with feeble movements, he threw it at the beast. Of course, the force was next to nothing. But,

Youth: "Get... away from Su... baru-sama. You... monster..."

Wrenching out his voice in midst groans of pain, he nonetheless asserted his will.

The moment those words struck him, Subaru suddenly felt a quiver running through his body. Losing his voice as it reached the tips of his fingers, not knowing what to say, Subaru watched in silence.

Subaru: "-----"

Then, came rocks, boards, sticks, and shoes, thrown at the monster's body from all directions.

What he was seeing was the people who should have been broken under the overwhelming pressure emanating from the beast putting up a clumsy, weak, and almost surreal resistance.

Subaru: "H-hey..."

"What are they doing?", Subaru thought, astounded.

What is the point of doing something like that? Did they think they could do something to the beast? Would it penetrate its fur and hide, and do any damage to the flesh beneath? That's not even possible. It won't even leave a scratch. It's only futile resistance.

Subaru: "Stop..."

Hugging their heads and running away should have been the wisest choice.

They should have all boarded any still-functional dragon carriages and immediately fled this place. Either escape into the Sanctuary, or break through the forest. They should have taken an action that left them at least a small chance of staying alive. And yet, why were they—

Subaru: "Everyone, what're you doing!? Hurry, run away..."

Old Man: "Subaru-sama! You won't convince us just like that!"

Subaru waved his arms, desperately trying to convey his intentions, but his words were cut short.

The one who shouted back was an old man with limbs like dried twigs, who, swinging up one arm with all his might, threw a branch that struck directly on the beast's snout. Then, panting, he looked over to Subaru,

Old Man: "If we ran for our lives and abandoned our benefactor, how could we ever show our face in front of our kids again? Besides, you came here in order to help us..."

Subaru: "That's..."

Old Man: "If you die here, then we'll die here as well. That's the least we'll be willing to accept, and that's what everyone's already agreed on."

Stunned, Subaru's face stiffened. Seeing Subaru's astonished expression, for some reason, a gentle smile appeared on the man's face. It was just way too out of place, a bright smile that almost made one forget about the threat that was before them.

The attack resumed. Everyone struck at once at the murderous beast— Garfiel, with a hail of stones. But its power was just as weak as before. Far from causing him to flinch, it wasn't even enough to scratch an itch.

Slowly raising his massive body, Garfiel began to move. Ignoring Subaru at the forest's edge, who was only waiting to be torn apart—it turned to the youth who had thrown the first stone.

Youth: “———”

The beast and the youth faced one another. In front of the overwhelming pressure, the youth lost his voice, but, with only the act of drawing his short sword from its sheath on his hip, he asserted his will,

Youth: “Then, eat this—!”

Placing all his force behind the thrust, the youth drove it between Garfiel's brows—and, in the next instant, with a shrill sound, the blade snapped in two.

Perhaps because the golden fur possessed considerable resilience, the crudely made blade failed to penetrate it. Then, as the youth completed his final defiance, the beast raised its paw,

Subaru: “Stop—!!”

Subaru screamed. But even so, in the face of the inevitable, it was nothing but empty noise.

Accompanied by the sound of crushing flesh, the youth's scrawny body was crushed from head-to-toe into a pulp under the force of the impact. Blood sprayed like a fountain from the gaps of Garfiel's claws, and when he lifted the paw once more, left in its wake was nothing but a swirling, dark red puddle of gore.

Subaru: “———”

This time, a scream of pure wrath rose in his throat.

With a screech that could slice through metal, Subaru scrambled off the ground and threw himself directly at the monster's back. But the attack was snuffed out by a light rise of the beast's hind-paw. His momentum was met by the paw, and, just like that, Subaru's was kicked into the air like a rubber ball, sending his back crashing into the trunk of a large tree—his entire body cracked in the sound of shattering bones.

Subaru: “Ga—aaaaagh—!?”

Rolling onto the ground, giant clots of blood surging up his aching throat spilled from his mouth. His body was unresponsive. His right arm, beginning from the shoulder, was twisted into a strange angle. His spine, having sustained that impact, completely lost its shape. Weak, and frail, nothing had changed at all.

Beast: “———!!”

Villagers: “Aaaah——!!”

The beast, barking, leaped into the fray of refugees around him, flaunting fangs and claws. Blood danced, shrieks resounded, and Subaru knew that lives were being extinguished in a place he could not see.

Someone was screaming. A bestial scream. Bestial, and yet in the voice of a human. Confusion ran through the beast. Whose scream was it? What was it roaring for? Trapped within his own failures, Subaru did not know the answer.

???: “——Natsuki-san! Please stay alive!”

His name was called. It was the voice of someone he knew, but his mind’s attempt to match the voice to a name was obstructed by the pain. His thoughts flashed and dimmed, the world grew out of focus, and even his own emotions were vague. He could no longer distinguish a dream from reality. Hatred and pain scattered all else into the wind.

He mustn’t fall asleep here. He must stand up. Stand up, stand up, if anyone is going to die, you have to be the one to die first.

Subaru: “...Don...’t die... ev... ryone... Just me, dying... is more than enough...!”

Spewing blood while wrenching out these words, Subaru desperately tried to push himself off the ground. His right arm already useless, he frantically crawled with his left. A red curtain had been drawn over his left field of vision, and Subaru knew that it was the blood flowing from his forehead. Roughly scraping his eyelids against his shoulder, he clenched his teeth as if to crush his molars, and turned up his face.

Subaru: “———”

The carnage spanned out before him.

Every swing of the beast’s arm sent men flying, blood spraying, extinguishing the flames of life.

No matter how courageous and desperate their resolve, their resistance fell uselessly against the beast. Its golden fur was stained only with their blood, and their deaths had no meaning at all.

Mere defiance, only to be blown away like dust. Not the slightest meaning at all. If there was only a single death that could be meaningful, it was Subaru's.

Subaru: "Stop it, stop it, stop it stop it stop it... Please, stop...!"

If you are going to kill, kill me first. He was the target to begin with. There was no reason to hurt those brave, kind people, no reason to take their lives.

Or, rather, wasn't their deaths just another consequence of Subaru's stupidity? If so, then isn't it just too—

Subaru: "—Ugh, ah!?"

Subaru felt his body being picked up, as his face dropped down towards the ground.

Dangling helplessly from his back, Subaru was lifted off the ground by Patrasche, who was bleeding profusely from her wounds. Despite only barely clinging onto life after Garfiel's merciless strike, she had crawled to Subaru's side.

Witnessing her pitiful state, Subaru could not hold back what was welling up in the back of his eye from flowing out,

Subaru: "No, it's alright... that's enough. You've done enough, Patrasche..."

Softly calling to her, Subaru reached out his hand to Patrasche's blood-soaked jaw. But she shook her head at Subaru's voice, as if trying to say, "It's not over yet, you know". Then, tugging her muzzle under Subaru's stomach, she lifted the helpless Subaru onto her back.

Subaru groaned in surprise. And with this, Patrasche set out her steps. The steadiness of her strides made one wonder just how she still had strength left within her.

No doubt, she was using up the last strengths of her life.

Subaru: "———"

But even with the last ounce of life force she could muster, straining herself to the end, her speed was nothing compared to what she was usually capable of. And so, it was far from enough to escape the pursuing fangs.

The beast's teeth sank into Patrasche's hind leg as she shrieked with pain. Once again, Subaru was thrown into the air. But, floating weightlessly through space, just as he was prepared to crash to the ground, Patrasche reached out her neck and caught him in her jaw.

And, in the same motion, with all her might, she used her head to throw him as far as she could into the depths of the trees.

Subaru: "———!"

Subaru knew that it was all Patrasche could have done to put him as far from harm's way as she could.

At the same time, he realized it. Why, after parting with Ram, she had taken the shortcuts through the forest to rejoin with the train of refugees.

——Patrasche had sensed the existence of the beast.

And because she sensed it, to increase the chance of Subaru's survival, if only by a little, she fled towards the place where there were the largest number of other preys. All to protect Subaru.

Slamming onto the ground, Subaru's body bounced once, then twice. And after wailing at the third bounce—— weightlessness overtook his body once again.

Subaru: "——Ah."

A steep slope opened into a ravine, and Subaru's body rolled straight downward. Without even the strength to cry out, scraped by branches and gravel, tossed from bounce to bounce, Subaru's body tumbled and fell,

Subaru: "———"

Sliding in somersaults, his vision swirling and swaying, Subaru caught a glimpse of what was above him.

There, he witnessed a sight he had no wish to see.

Subaru: “———Patrasche.”

The great tiger held Patrasche’s body in its jaws, and clenched down with unimaginable force. Its fangs tore into her flesh, and in a mass of spraying blood, her body was crushed in two.

Unable to even cry out in death, the loyal dragon sacrificed her last for Subaru.

Subaru: “———”

His throat burned. His throat was tearing. Rage was boiling his brain and it felt like his blood was catching fire.

Bouncing, tumbling, sliding, rolling, scraping, Subaru went on falling.

—Rebounding high into the air, he felt weightless once again.

Crashing to the ground, his consciousness was swallowed into the impact.

His body did not stop falling. But all awareness had already separated from his flesh.

—Only a resentful voice, which refused to disappear, swirled and churned within his chest.

Arc 4 Chapter 43 - And then Everyone was—

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 11, Chapter 1 “The Value of a Life”, Parts 6-7

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

—What woke him was the feeling of water drops dripping onto his face.

The steady rhythm of cold droplets splashing on his cheek pulled his consciousness upward. And alongside the awakening of his consciousness, an acute sense of being alive slowly permeated throughout his body.

Simply put, it was that primal and intense sensation which required no words to convey— Pain.

Subaru: “...Dgah.”

As if to welcome Subaru’s awakening, agonizing pain embraced him with open arms. Once the initial shock was felt, there was no way to avoid the rest of the onslaught.

His cracked forehead, his mangled right arm, and his spine that was marred by the extreme impact all shrieked with pain. But, far exceeding all of them, was,

Subaru: “This’s b... ad...”

Directing his gaze towards the source of the razor-sharp pain, Subaru found that a branch as thick as two fingers had skewered him through the area under his right collarbone. Its point was slick with blood, and as much as Subaru rallied his resolve to pull it out in spite of the pain, it refused to budge an inch.

Fortunately, the branch was broken on the way down, so, as long as Subaru ignored it visually, it wouldn’t do much to impede his movements.

Subaru: “Way too eccentric... this fashion...”

Somehow managing to get his unresponsive body to move and sitting himself up, Subaru leaned into a nearby rock-face to catch his breath. Looking over his surroundings, he found himself at the entrance of a small cave. Apparently, the water dripping onto his face was the morning dew falling from the top of the cave's mouth— But morning dew would mean,

Subaru: "It's morning...!?"

As Subaru understood the heartless passage of time, intense pain coursed up his trembling body as though the back of his eye was painted red and his entire body was pierced by needles. A tear rose in his single eye as his thoughts slowly caught up.

What happened to him before he lost consciousness? Recalling it,

Subaru: "—Ah."

Subaru remembered what senseless tragedy his existence had brought.

Timidly gazing upwards, he saw the daylight penetrating between the gaps of the trees and into the forest. Bathed in that light, Subaru looked up towards the slope from which he fell— wondering what kind of scene was awaiting him there.

Subaru: "—Ugh."

Gulping down a breath, tormented by the guilt of not dying straight away, Subaru crawled at a caterpillar's pace, heading towards the other side of the slope.

Although his movements were hindered by the branch jutting from his chest, slowly but surely, he drew closer with time.

If this was the old Subaru, just imagining the scene that was awaiting him would have gripped him with horror, and he would probably have run away, refusing to look. But the current Subaru would not permit that.

He must see it to the end, swallow it down, and make it his food.

Because this was the duty of Natsuki Subaru, having failed to die when he should have.

Subaru: “Haa... Haaa.”

With one crawl, and then another, he dragged himself up the slope with only his upper body off the ground. With panting breaths, sweat soaking the dried wounds on his forehead, blood seeping out once more. He rudely wiped at it with his sleeve, soiling his face with mud and blood as he crawled.

Crawling past a totaled carriage, passing around a large toppled tree, Subaru’s fingers reached the destined rim of the slope— The spot from which Patrasche threw him in her sacrifice.

Subaru: “———”

For a moment, there was hesitation.

By raising his head and extending his neck to peek over, Subaru would be faced with the inescapable reality. He will no longer be able to escape into his imagination and indulge in the fantasy that some miracle might have occurred after he was driven away and that the majority of the refugees had managed to escape.

Subaru: “What am I, stupid...? No, I am stupid.”

Without a doubt, in his one-sided vision, Subaru had witnessed the moment Patrasche was crushed under the beast’s jaw. After offering her all for Subaru, the instant of that loyal dragon’s death was still branded into the back of Subaru’s eyelids. To pretend that it was a dream or to escape into some convenient fantasy was nothing less than to insult her, who had sacrificed the very last embers of her life for Subaru.

Igniting the flame of conviction in his heart, Subaru wrenched out what little willpower he had left and opened his eye. Pushing himself up on his stomach, through the thick branches obstructing his vision and beyond the opening forest, in the scene of the tragedy—

Subaru: “———Ah?”

There was nothing.

Nothing at all.

Subaru: “How is that... pos... sible?”

With his face still twisted from imagining the carnage that was supposed to have panned out before him, Subaru's eye bulged in disbelief, unable to accept the scene that dawned on his sight.

There were scattered wrecks of carriages and several uprooted trees. Claw marks were still gouged deep into the ground, and there were signs of destruction and resistance all over.

And yet, the most heartbreaking sight was not there.

The remnants of the slaughter. The corpses of the villagers who, in the truest sense of the words, gave their lives so Subaru could escape. The corpse of the ground dragon who was torn in two for her loyalty.

They were all nowhere to be found.

Subaru: "——"

The beast and the battle could not have been a dream. The scattered wreckages proved this. Only, the consequence of the tragedy was missing.

With great effort, Subaru used a nearby tree to pull himself up. Fortunately, after the initial shock had passed, the wounds in his leg and hips were no more than superficial scrapes and bruises. He stood up, holding his right arm steady with his left to stop it from hurting from the motion of dangling. And, looking over his surroundings,

Subaru: "Ho... w? Where's Patrasche... Everyone... Otto?"

He didn't want to see their corpses.

Honestly, he would like nothing more than if everyone survived. But there was no way for that kind of pipe dream to be true. Subaru, of all people, knew this down to the very cells that composed his body.

After all, before Subaru lost consciousness, he had already witnessed several lives being extinguished by the beast's claws.

The scrawny youth fought to the end, but without leaving even a single scratch, he was crushed. There was the woman who lost her life when she was tossed out from the dragon carriage that was sent flying. And the old man was snapped like a dried twig by a single swing of the beast's claw, leaving nothing but a miserable corpse behind.

With every remembered death, pain and regret shaved away at Subaru's heart. Yet, even so, those deaths that he supposedly witnessed here had somehow been stolen from this place.

Subaru: "Patrasche... Patrasche...?"

Thinking of the lives that were lost, Subaru feebly and despairingly called his partner's name.

The moment her body was torn in two, and the pain of her final gasp, Subaru had certainly seen and heard it, so he had no fleeting hopes that she could still be alive. Nevertheless, he had wanted to find her soul-departed remains, and apologize. It was something only Subaru could do.

His steps dragged, and his body was near exhaustion. The search was slow and feeble, and it took all of two hours just to explore the surrounding area.

But despite spending all this time, all Subaru found was,

Subaru: "Luggage mixed with the wreckages, scraps of clothes, and..."

Massive amounts of blood.

Just as Subaru imagined with near certainty, everything carved by the beast's claws was accompanied by mass volumes of blood. He had expected there to be the choking stench of blood drifting about the scene, but perhaps because the blood clotting up Subaru's nose canal had deprived him of his olfactory senses, he didn't smell a thing.

He had already assembled enough evidence that the fact could not be denied. Yet the only piece he could not find was the conclusive proof itself, and how it came to be lost was enshrouded in mystery.

Even more importantly, it was while searching through the surroundings, that the extremely belated question finally burned into his mind. That is—

Subaru: "Why wasn't I... killed...?"

He didn't finish Subaru off— Although Subaru surviving all those wounds may have been difficult to believe, it would still have been far too careless to have gone back without at least inspecting the body. After all, Subaru was Garfiel's target to begin with.

Even though he still couldn't understand why Garfiel would turn his claws to the refugees, he might have done it to teach Subaru a lesson.

But if that were the case, there would be even less reason for the bodies to disappear.

Subaru: "Even if... they were carried away..."

There were 42 refugees in total. Even if everyone was turned into a corpse, it would still be too unrealistic to tow them all away, not to mention Patrasche and the other ground dragons as well.

Subaru: "But still..."

He didn't want to imagine it, but if they were swallowed into the great beast's belly— Yet, for the same numerical problem, it wasn't a realistic theory. At least, while it was conceivable how they could be carried away, what was inconceivable was how they could afford the labor required to hide the bodies from sight.

In the end, before even considering whether the tiger would do such a roundabout thing, the crucial question was why it didn't make an effort to finish the wounded Subaru off.

Subaru: "——"

Suddenly, it occurred to him just how much this scene resembled the depopulated Sanctuary.

Although the conditions leading up to it were different, the results had many points in common. All the signs of the surrounding destruction were from the great tiger's rampage, and unrelated to the tiger and the refugee's disappearance. If one looked past the this most striking aspect of the scene, the two were eerily similar in that there were no bodies in sight. In other words,

Subaru: "Th—the Sanctuary would be in the same state as last time too...?"

His breath growing ragged as he came to that conclusion, Subaru once again used up all his strength to stand. Then, looking over his surroundings, he deduced the direction of the Sanctuary.

—This was the morning of the sixth day.

Last night was probably the deadline for the mansion. Although he could not say for certain, if Elsa's attack took place, then it was already too late to prevent the tragedy.

On the Sanctuary's side, something must have happened that made the tiger form Garfiel abandon the thought of dealing Subaru the final blow. That something must have also been the reason why everyone here disappeared. But why the same thing didn't happen to Subaru remained completely unknown.

Subaru: “———”

Which way to go? Subaru hesitated for only a moment.

A warmth passing through his chest sent a faint ache across his heart. It was the inseverable sensation of guilt and remorse for the girl, still in her slumber, and all those he left in the mansion.

Clenching his teeth, Subaru shook off these emotions and turned his steps to the Sanctuary.

With slow, dragging steps, to find out what had happened, Subaru made his way towards the Sanctuary.

What was waiting for him ahead? So that he could burn something worthy of the lives that were lost into his memories, he intended to spend this life for that redemption, even if only for the smallest hint to increase his chances of prevailing in the end.

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—On the way to the Sanctuary, he passed through the place where Ram and Garfiel had fought.

There were scars left by wind-blades on the trunks of the nearby trees, as well as familiar claw-marks carved into the earth and the rocks, brutally gouged out by whole chunks at a time.

He briefly searched the area for any signs of Ram— or, most likely, Ram's body. But, unsurprisingly, he did not find her.

If the enormous tiger really was Garfiel, then, to him, she should have been his long-time crush. Subaru might even have believed it if their feelings grew into something deeper, but,

Subaru: “To go to the point of killing each other just to say «I like you»... I must’ve read too many light novels.”

Because neither of them would back down, it did not end until one had killed the other.

Just how much could that love, or longing, have helped to stem the tide? If it truly could have stopped the violence, it would have stopped it before it even began.

The moment they had cast it aside, there was already nothing that could have stopped them.

Subaru: “...I’m... sorry.”

She was nowhere in sight, but Subaru nevertheless offered his apology to the girl who did her best to save him.

Her fight would also become meaningless, and her thought would have been in vain once Subaru returned to the Sanctuary. For ahead of his path was something Subaru needed, now that he intended to die.

Despite his mounting regrets, Subaru doggedly walked towards the Sanctuary. The road on which he had begun walking before noon was only a distance of about ten minutes on Patrasche’s back.

Defying his wounds, and advancing at a caterpillar’s pace, it was already evening by the time Subaru drew close to the Sanctuary.

Subaru: “Took half a day... Fin... ally...”

He was back.

Almost collapsing on the spot due to relief, the slightest sense of accomplishment was not present. Instead, the flame consuming Subaru’s insides was the sense of powerlessness and anger at himself. And far surpassing his self-hatred, was something black and shimmering,

Subaru: “Are you fucking back yet... Huh, Garfiel...?”

Don’t think about it, don’t think about it, he told himself in his heart to stem the overpowering hatred and rage towards that golden-haired piece of shit.

There were three primary reasons he returned to the Sanctuary.

The first was to get to the bottom of the mystery of how everyone had disappeared. It was essential for the future to grasp at least a part of that answer.

The second was to confirm that Emilia, who had remained in the Sanctuary, was safe. If everyone had disappeared, she would probably be no exception. So he intended to make sure.

And the third, far greater than the previous two reasons combined, was that furious flame charring the depths of Subaru's heart.

The impulse to tear that bloody tiger apart.

He took a step into the Sanctuary. Two moss ridden pillars stood in place of an entrance. Passing between them and entering the Sanctuary, Subaru quietly lowered the sound of his breathing as he looked around him.

Silence had fallen on the Sanctuary, as one would expect of a place devoid of people. But even before that, Subaru had not heard a single insect in the forest on his whole walk here.

It wasn't just the residents of the Sanctuary that had disappeared. It was as though the activity of every living thing in the region had been halted into silence.

Subaru: "———"

Even his own breathing felt too noisy in this silence. Subaru painfully pushed his throat to the limit to not make a sound. Taking short, careful breaths and dragging steps, Subaru headed to the depths of the Sanctuary— To the house where Emilia should be.

—In the hours before nightfall, Emilia would be passing the time leading up to the Trials curled up and hugging her knees. This usually became particularly striking after the third day, and especially this time, when Subaru was not at her side. Most likely, isolation and frustration had been shaving down her heart more acutely than in any of the loops before this.

Subaru: "Not here, huh..."

Pushing open the door and looking inside, Subaru saw no one in the room and sighed.

Although Emilia was absent, her unoccupied bed was messy, and a chair was left knocked over by the bed. He could not be sure if this happened while she was resisting whatever caused the disappearance, or if Emilia, worn to her limit, had done this out of impulse.

Only, all the way along the road, Subaru hadn't encountered a single person.

Subaru: "Should I stop by Roswaal's place...?"

Accepting that Emilia was no longer here, Subaru's heart was calm as he considered the next course of action. Although decisiveness in carrying out his plan was necessary, part of himself already knew that he would find nothing even if he went there.

Just as he feared, there was no one in the Sanctuary. The moment Emilia was gone, Subaru should no longer have any attachment to this place.

Emilia, who was supposed to be the subject of his attachments, had disappeared. But, as Subaru noticed, even this had barely caused a stir in his heart.

Was it because he finally had acquired that unshakable, dauntless, dazzling heart of steel?

No, Subaru immediately shook his head.

This sense of loss, of being deprived of the harbor of his emotions, was far too different from that heart of steel he had strived for. This, was but the result of excessive rage at the end of incomprehension, having worn everything else away, leaving only a fractured heart behind.

It was not unshakable, but only drained of all its contents.

—He had already lost the will to live. Of course, it was only natural.

The current Subaru wasn't living for the sake of living. He had failed to die when he was supposed to, and so, he couldn't die until he had found something to justify his prolonged life.

In other words, it was not the will to live, but the resolve to die where all his consciousness was focused.

What was there to live for in a world like this?

Emilia was gone. Rem was gone. Patrasche was dead, and most likely Ram and Petra, too. And there was no question whether Otto had survived or not.

There was no one. There was no one left. Because Subaru wasn't smart enough, because Subaru wasn't strong enough, because Subaru didn't try hard enough, because Subaru didn't want it enough, he failed to save everyone. He didn't save anyone. Even though it was something only Subaru could do.

Subaru: "So... I..."

Have to take it all back. See it to the end. And set everything on the correct path.

It was something only Subaru could do. And it was something Subaru had to do.

The entirety of the sacrifices made for that path's sake; Subaru must always keep them in his heart.

The entirety of those who were lost; Subaru must always keep them in his thoughts.

The entirety of the price that must be paid; Subaru must always continue to pay it.

To pay whatever price. Pile on the sacrifices. And take it all back in the end.

Subaru: "-----"

Limping and staggering, Subaru came out of the building.

His steps did not turn towards the residence where Roswaal was recuperating, but to the very depths of the Sanctuary—the Tomb. Last time, wandering through the depopulated Sanctuary, it was there where he was killed by something. This time, he was heading to the exact same spot.

What for? To be killed, of course.

If the conditions were the same as last time, then Subaru should be killed there in the exact same manner. But, knowing that the attack would come, Subaru judged that he should be able to dodge at least one fatal strike.

Even if he was killed by the second blow, as long as he could catch a glimpse of the enemy's true form, it would be enough.

Having prepared the resolve to die, step by step, Subaru steadily approached his destination.

The place where his stomach was gouged through from behind— Although he couldn't remember the exact spot, he was certain it was only inches from the entrance of the Tomb.

Spotting the tip of the Tomb's structure in the distance, Subaru's heart rate grew frantic as the blood pulsing through his body flashed between hot and cold. Was it heating up or cooling down? Even that, he couldn't tell.

His body was hot, his hands and feet were numb. But his fingers were stiff, cold, as if pressed against frozen lead, and his head was cool enough to objectively see his situation.

A foolish existence heading to its death, knowing that it would die.

He was supposed to have made an oath in his heart to wager his life in exchange for results, but his expression was far from that resolute will. His brows were downcast, he bit his lips, and his limbs trembled uncontrollably.

All pretense fell away in the final moments, as he reviled himself for revealing that weakness underneath. Pushing that sentiment aside, Subaru went on without slowing his steps.

Even though he couldn't change the fact that he was weak, frail and stupid, he nonetheless wanted to have the courage to move forward from that self, and become the self he had always wanted.

Just like how a negative and a negative makes a positive, his crooked optimism was banking on weakness and weakness producing something good. And with this, Subaru steadily treaded along the path towards the Tomb, and towards death.

The Tomb drew closer. His heartbeats thumped, and he could clearly listen to the sound of his blood pulsing through his scalp. The bile retching up from his empty stomach burned in his throat. His trembling knees were on the verge of collapsing to the ground, and his left field of vision was drenched by sweat, blurring everything in sight.

Roughly raising his left arm to wipe his eye, he faced forward once again. And it was then, he noticed it.

Subaru: “—Ah?”

Just as he lifted his leg towards the Tomb, Subaru saw that a change had taken place before his eyes.

Without even the chatter of insects audible, there was only the chorus of the occasional rustling of leaves stirred up by the wind. But suddenly, there was the sound of a small, intermittent chirp, cutting into the previous normalcy.

At first, Subaru thought it was a small, white furball being blown over by the wind.

But the furball stopped just a few paces in front of Subaru, and made a little twitch. Incredulous, Subaru furrowed his brows as he saw two long ears pop up.

Subaru: “A, rabbit?”

A little animal with two long ears and white, fluffy fur. With two characteristic red eyes, its mouth jittered as it looked about its surroundings. Then, looking up at Subaru, it tilted its little head, and let out a high-pitched squeal.

A small, teeny-tiny rabbit. It was about the size of Subaru’s fist and, at a glance, it was not that far from the size of a hamster. But since its ears were as big as the rest of its body, the term “fits in your hand” might be slightly misleading.

In a place where bugs, humans, and dragons all vanished without a trace, there was suddenly a rabbit.

Although it could be just one of the critters that lived in the forest, considering how Subaru hadn’t encountered a single living creature up to this point, seeing it here was exceedingly strange.

Subaru: “Why is there a rabbit here... It... is a rabbit... right?”

With endless questions, Subaru looked over his surroundings, confused, trying to see if there were other animals besides this rabbit that had wandered back into the Sanctuary. And, with no particular intention, he reached out his hand towards the rabbit, hoping to confirm what it was, or perhaps just wanting to pet its fur—

Subaru: “———”

The next moment, Subaru’s entire left hand was detached from his wrist upwards.



Illustration from Volume 11, coloring by u/Y_alruqaishi ([source](#))

Blood sprayed out from the ragged, sloppy wound, and green-blue veins dangled from the stump. Were the thin, white strings tendons or nerves? Either way, it's always something grotesque when human body parts are destroyed— And those, were his few seconds of escape from reality.

Pain of an entirely other dimension trashed at Subaru's brain, and, suffocating from the agony, his body collapsed to the ground. The branch that pierced his collarbone snapped in half upon impact, transforming into shattering pain. Pain, pain, pain.

Subaru: "Ggha!? Aa,uaghaa! Aaaau, uuuuaaaghaaaAAAAA!!!"

His thoughts turned white-hot.

It hurts. Every cell of his body was dominated by this emotion of pain and there was already no way to register the reality of the agony as the thought occurred to him why it had to hurt so much and where it came from and why was it happening to him and why it hurt so much and it hurts it hurts it hurts it hurts it hurts it hurts it hurts it hurts—

Suffocating from sheer agony, blood gushed from Subaru's wrist as he drove it into the ground, and, for some reason, he bit into the earth, inexplicably gnawing at the puddle of mud. The bitter, asphyxiating soil brought back a moment of mental clarity, and his eyes dashed as if searching for the cause, when he saw the white furball at his feet— The little animal's white fur was speckled with dots of red, and its tiny mouth was busy working away. Under its black nose, its cheeks were puffed up, twitching. And, sticking out of its mouth, Subaru saw his left pinky finger.

Understood. Gotcha. What happened here? He got eaten. He got eaten. He just got eaten.

Subaru: "Gu, ghhfffuuaaaAAAAA!!!"

Comprehension and pain drove him into a scream bordering insanity, Subaru turned to face the rabbit. His right arm was broken and immobile, and his left wrist was in the rabbit's belly. There was nothing he could do, but if he could just confirm its true form—

He felt something burning into his thigh. With the unamusing shock of sharp, merciless blades scraping his flesh to the bone, he turned up the whites of his eyes as white foam gushed from the back of his throat. If only he could lay down his head and faint, but the intensity of the agony had no intention of releasing his consciousness.

Bubbling blood spilled from the corner of his lips, and he writhed like a fish on land. The fact that his ears could still hear, must be both a miracle and a joke by a cruel God.

Like the rustle of lapping waves, the sound captured Subaru's eardrums.

Little hops. Small, tiny bodies. The chain of overlapping chirps expanded to enormity, and even if his vision were still present, he had no desire to count them.

And, in a moment, he was sincerely glad that the only thing left to him was his ears.

Simultaneously feeling the bites of feeding teeth over his whole body, now, through the tactile and unmistakable pain, Subaru understood that he was being devoured by threats numbering in the hundreds.

He shrieked. And a surge pushed him onto his back as his throat trembled. Immediately, furry creatures dived into his opened mouth. His tongue was torn to shreds, sharp teeth flashed across the depths of his throat, ravaging everything from his esophagus to his stomach.

Inside, they collided with the others that had invaded from his rectum, and, as if descending into a competition, they devoured his organs left and right, turning Natsuki Subaru into minced feed.

It was the unmistakable sensation of being alive while living creatures shredded him from within. Fear had already left him. There was barely any more pain. He couldn't understand why he was still conscious.

He was being eaten. He was being eaten. His left eye was gouged out. His ears were no longer there. His organs had already been consumed, and now the skin of his face was being peeled off. A hole opened in his skull, and teeth sank into his exposed, bulging brain—

-----Ah--

Arc 4 Chapter 44 - Forbidden

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 11, Chapter 4 “The Value of a Life”, Part 8, and Volume 11
Chapter 5 “The Witches’ Tea Party”, Parts 1-2 (first two-thirds)

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken – [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#)

—His body was formed anew.

His devoured flesh, his peeled skin, his gnawed bones, his chewed nerves, his slurped-up blood, and his soul, trampled and ravaged with the utmost gluttonous relish— returned to their original shapes.

A sensation came from his fingertips, and with this as the starting point, his whole body began to jolt and convulse.

Kicking up dust, writhing on the cold, hard ground, he groaned as white foam flowed from the corner of his mouth.

There was no pain. Nor sense of loss. His four limbs were still attached to his torso, and no physical damage had been incurred by his head and body. Yet his thoughts were vague as though he had just woken from sleep, and instead of clearing in a matter of seconds, Subaru’s body and mind continued to reject the homecoming of reality.

Such was the horror of the events preceding his Return by Death.

Could anyone say that they’ve experienced being invaded through the mouth and having their intestines shredded and devoured from inside? Or ever had the feeling of having their skins peeled off as if it were a competition, exposing their dark red flesh and allowing their pink fat to be licked away by unruly tongues?

His brain refused to feel that pain, and as though it was happening to someone else’s body and not his own, he objectively recognized the truth that he was being eaten, like in a waking nightmare.

Subaru: “Bgh, bgh, bgh...”

A nauseating sensation rushed up, and only yellow bile was retched from his dried-up stomach. The foam blowing from his mouth mixed with the acidic liquid, as Subaru continued to convulse, collapsed on his side.

Like a person having a seizure, or a fish flopping on land, the rejection of reality was not by Subaru’s own volition, but by the choice of his very soul.

Because who would gladly assent to their own existence being devoured and eaten? And who could blame Subaru for interpreting the reality of his being devoured in such a way?

What had he done to deserve it, whose will was behind it, and was there no alternative to that wretched end?

Subaru: “———”

His consciousness flashed and flickered. Were his eyes open or shut? No control over his body returned to him.

His very soul refused to live in reality. Far from allowing him to choose awareness, his soul did not even present him with the choice.

Only, overwhelmed by the loss of its own existence, Subaru’s body continued to drown in that sense of despair.

—Why.

If there was a single definite word within Subaru’s mind, it would be that one.

—Why.

What the hell happened? What was that? Why did that happen? Why did that have to happen? What was happening to him now? Was there something that must happen to him now? What was he supposed to do now?

—Why, why, why, why, why.

Presented with no answers, while even the question itself was uncertain, there was only the shrieking of his soul.

—Why! Why! Why!

He continued to throw out the question, which went without an answer, an unsightly figure who doesn't know when to give up.

Drowning in reality, tormented by a nightmare, one who had lost sight of the path of life, a figure asking why.

And, it was then—

???: *"You have once again acquired the qualifications."*

A voice whispered in the ears of the shivering Subaru.

High, and exalted. A voice which, even if the present Subaru heard it, he could not decipher its meaning. Nonetheless, the terrible voice echoed into Subaru's interior—

???: *"You are invited— To the Witch's tea party."*

In the next instant, Subaru's only-just-returned consciousness once again lost all reality.

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A refreshing wind reminiscent of summer blew across the small hill of lush, green grass.

The cool breeze caressed Subaru's bangs, swaying the tall, green grass behind him, then, passing the hill and through the plains, it made its way towards the distant blue sky where white clouds were dancing.

Lightly touching his fingertips to his bangs that were being tickled by the invisible wind, Subaru squinted his eyes at the dazzling sunlight before slowly lowering his gaze to look directly in front of him.

Without knowing how or when, he found himself seated in a swaying armchair. And across a small white table, sitting with her legs crossed in the same type of chair, with an impression of pure white hair and

pure white skin that was only overturned by her funerary dress, was a girl— Or not, for that might not have been the appropriate word.

Subaru: “After all, it’s a Witch-sama who’s been idling here for more than four hundred years...”

Echidna: “Well, that’s an awful thing to say to a girl. In my case, I died when I was nineteen, you know. Shouldn’t I look like a pretty young girl who’s quite a perfect match for you?”

Subaru: “That «died when I was nineteen» part was pretty heavy-sobering... Also, please don’t use that kind of weird statement to try and get close to me. A perfect match for me... that’s gonna send snot flying out my nose, you know.”

Echidna: “Aya, my, my... Have I just been dumped?”

Subaru: “Not at all. I’m just telling you not to say stuff that’ll make your value plummet, you know. I’m quite aware of how much of a low-life, bottom feeder scum I am. Calling yourself a perfect match for me is only gonna drag you down instead of pulling me up. I mean I... haven’t done anything to make me deserve anything like that.”

His fists resting on his knees opened and clenched as Subaru spilled these words, looking up to the sky with a bitter expression.

Hearing this, the Witch— Echidna rested her elbows on the white table and her cheeks in her hands, inspecting Subaru up and down with her gaze.

Echidna: “You sure seem to have a low opinion of yourself.”

Subaru: “When you’re surrounded by epic characters all the time, it’s only natural you’d get into the habit of turning up your head every time you talk. Even though I thought I was supposed to have gotten over that inferiority complex already...”

Looking back on everything he had done up to this point, Subaru tightly clenched his fists. The force of his grip sent his knuckles clicking as he took a single, deep breath,

Subaru: “So... What made you send me this tea party invite?”

Echidna: “It’s nothing complicated. I am the Witch of Greed, the Incarnation of the Thirst for Knowledge. The thirst, and the desiring heart are pleasures to me, and to have something to yearn to know, to moan and sigh asking «why» is indeed the greatest of all pleasures.”

Saying this, Echidna brought her teacup to her lips.

With the sound of its contents passing down her throat, she lightly smiled,

Echidna: “If I must give a reason, I hope you can understand that it is because you yourself expressed the wish to enter my Citadel, in a location closely connected to this place.”

Subaru: “Don’t give me that convoluted... Well, anyway, we can leave why you invited me here for now. More importantly, there’s something I want to ask.”

Dismissing Echidna’s words by waving his hand, Subaru leaned forward. Locking his gaze onto her beautiful, white features,

Subaru: “What... happened to me?”

Echidna: “Isn’t that something you should know yourself?”

Subaru: “Knowing and comprehending are different things. I can kind of objectively understand the situation I was in, but that understanding doesn’t fit my current situation at all.”

Echidna: “How so?”

Subaru: “My head was going insane, and I was drowning on land in my own foam, but here, I’m presentable and my head is at least functioning well enough to carry on a conversation. So it’s pretty natural that I’d figure you had something to do with this.”

Although he was carrying on the exchange somewhat mockingly, Subaru’s mind was in overdrive trying to come to some understanding of his present situation.

At the very least, being invited to this so-called tea party inside Echidna’s dream world had granted his heart a room to breathe.

Having been given the space to calm his thoughts and search his mind, Subaru remembered the dire circumstances his body was facing in the real world before entering this dream. He did feel a certain sense of unease about leaving behind a body that was going through a state of shock to come here with his spirit, but,

Subaru: “Last time I attended your tea party, I woke up in bed with no idea how I got there, so I don’t know how the passage of time works in this place. I mean, in the actual world outside...”

Arriving at this conclusion, it suddenly occurred to him that this was no time to be relaxing and sipping tea.

—Since he was overtaken by convulsions in his state of shock, Subaru still had no idea what point in time he had returned to. Much less was he able to confirm the location where he lay writhing and foaming at the mouth.

Burning with regret at this late reaction, Subaru stood up, toppling the chair he was sitting in,

Subaru: “Echidna! Let me out of here now!”

Echidna: “I am appalled, to think you’d leave a Witch’s tea party without drinking a single sip of tea. You really should stop to consider just what kind of an existence is sitting before you—”

Subaru: “I don’t have time to chat with you! Let me out now! While we’re dawdling here like this, outside...”

Echidna: “You have already failed before by taking nothing away, do you still wish to go empty-handed...? Could it be that you actually want to relive that same loss and pain?”

Unable to hold back his anxiety, Subaru raised his voice at Echidna’s unhurried remarks. But, as if plunging that impatience into an icy bath, Echidna asked this in a voice that froze all emotions.

Subaru: “...Ah.”

Echidna: “To go on challenging to obtain results is something worthy of my praises. Whether it is the result you most desired, or the one you least desired, I find there is a certain beauty in the process of

trial and error on the road to that result. The fact that you continue to challenge without losing heart is most admirable, I feel. However,”

Raising a finger in front of the silenced Subaru, Echidna went on, narrowing her eyes,

Echidna: “If you do not heed the results of your previous attempts, and instead choose to follow the exact same paths to the exact same ends... Your actions would be a desecration to the accumulation of knowledge, and for one who would commit such acts, I hold nothing but contempt, and could not wait to be rid of you.”

Subaru: “You...”

Echidna: “Incidentally, to answer your question... the current time outside is immediately after you passed the First Trial of the Tomb. Fortunately, the flow of time here is different from the outside world. I am sure you won’t lose too much time just by having a cup of tea with me.”

What Subaru wanted to know, along with his every concern, Echidna checked off one by one.

If what she said could be believed, the time outside would be directly after the First Trial— That is to say, the restart point of Return by Death hadn’t changed.

And, left out of the tea party, his physical body would be in the room inside the Tomb, abandoned at Emilia’s side as she continued to battle her Trial.

Although he couldn’t just swallow everything Echidna said, at least, having this fact confirmed by a third party injected relief into Subaru’s anxious veins.

With the leeway granted by his calming heart, at last, the question arose—

Subaru: “Echidna... How much do you know?”

Echidna: “If you ask me how much I know, I only know as much as I know¹²⁰. But as for how much I want to know, I want to know everything in this world.”

¹²⁰ Monogatari reference.

Subaru: “Stop joking around, this is important. For instance... Yes, you just said this is immediately after the First Trial...”

The First Trial—— That phrase felt so distant now.

After saying farewell to his parents in the dream world, Subaru met Echidna in an empty school. And following a brief exchange of question and answers, Subaru returned to reality.

And after that, on the way up to this temporary calm, too much had happened to be put into mere words——

Subaru: “I mean, aside from that, this reunion would be right after we parted...”

Echidna: “Indeed. Certainly, in objective time, this would be true, and even in uncertain, subjective time, it has not been long since you and I parted. It must have only been a couple of minutes before we saw each other again.”

“Just how much are you yearning for me?”, Echidna seemed to suggest with her smile. But, seeing the joke wash off an expressionless Subaru, she gave a disappointed shrug.

Echidna: “It seems you just never give me the reactions I want. Not getting what I expected is both some parts frustrating and some parts delightful, quite a complicated feeling, really.”

Subaru: “I’ll be sure to arrange a nice leisurely date with that complicated girl’s heart of yours when I have the time. But for now,...”

Echidna: “Oh, I was so eager to celebrate our early reunion that I seem to have let my mouth run. Well, I guess there’s no helping it that I’d feel a little flustered. After all—”

Here, Echidna paused.

In the void created by the catching of a breath, within that moment, her dark, black pupils cast Subaru an alluring glance. What was that glimpse of emotion flashing through her eyes in that instant? Even now, Subaru could not be certain.

Only, as if welcoming Subaru’s confusion, Echidna returned a lovely, enchanting smile,

Echidna: “Unlike me, who parted with you only minutes ago, to you, it must have seemed like hours, or rather days, since we last met— isn’t that so?”

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Repeating Echidna’s words in his head, Subaru chewed over the contents that could have only one interpretation.

From what she just said, and her meaningful gaze and smile, there was no way he could be mistaken.

She— the Witch knew. The burden weighing on Subaru’s soul, the residues of his failed futures, the piece of knowledge that should be left nowhere in this world.

Subaru: “How...!?”

Echidna: “Let me answer your question this way. This is my Citadel, and I am the Witch of Greed. I haven’t shown it to you yet, have I?”

To Subaru’s wrenched-out question, Echidna tilted her head and held out her right hand.

Dancing lights descended onto her palm, eventually taking form— Until a single book, bound in pure white, appeared there.

There was no title inscribed on its cover, and it was about the size of a dictionary. Aside from the fact that its color was blinding white, for Subaru, the sight of the book brought back nothing but reviled memories.

Subaru: “That couldn’t be... a Gospel, could it?”

Echidna: “Oh my, you just made an expression I could understand without even having to look inside this book. It’s as if your face is trying to say, «You too!?». Just from that, I think I could already guess what you must’ve encountered in the outside world...”

Having read into Subaru's inner heart from just the look on his face, Echidna opened the white-bound book in her hand. And, running her eyes over its contents, "Mmhmhm", she nodded time and again as she followed along its texts,

Echidna: "I see, I think I more or less understand. Although there are still parts I don't entirely follow, I should be able to fill them in just by looking at you... Mnn, it's wonderful indeed. The feeling of missing pieces falling into place, the indescribable anticipation as the answer draws near. The fact that such feeling exists is precisely what makes life worth living...!"

Subaru: "...But, aren't you already dead?"

Being pushed into the back of his seat by the pressure of Echidna's incensed fervor, Subaru somehow managed to get a jab in. Hearing this, Echidna fiddled with her white hair, sulking,

Echidna: "When you rain on people's parades like that, even when it's true, it's still really demoralizing, you know. Anyway, then let me ease your worries... This book is not the same as the Gospels in your memories. Recorded in this book is neither the future nor the optimal solutions. Only truth."

Subaru: "Truth...?"

Echidna: "If the Gospel could be called a book of prophecies, then this book in my hands would be a book of histories. This book is not bound by its shape, and its manifestation is as vague and as vast as the oceans. It is not any book, and yet it could be any book that was, or indeed any book that could be... Its blank pages record only truth, and four hundred years ago, people of this world called it the Book of Wisdom. But, I like to call it..."

Subaru: "-----"

Echidna: "—the Memories of the World."

An outlandish name— for an equally outlandish power.

If what she said was true, then no matter who the person was, no matter what that person had done, as long as it belonged in the past and in history, it could be read from this book. In terms of gathering information, this would be nothing less than a game-breaking cheat.

Echidna: “But to tell you the truth, I don’t really like to rely on it. After all, only things witnessed with my own eyes can be truly burned into my memories. A magical book that skips the step of «acquiring information» and directly leads to «information acquired»— As much as I love to learn, it is difficult for me to judge the value of a book that bypasses the process of discovery.”

Subaru: “If you don’t want it you could give it to me. I’ll have plenty of uses for it. In fact, if I had that, finding the openings to my problems would be...”

Echidna: “You should abandon that idea if you don’t want to be a cripple.”

Echidna cut off Subaru’s smooth proposition straight off the bat, and held out the white-bound Memories of the World in front of him,

Echidna: “It may look harmless, but it’s still the instrument of a Witch. The volume of information that it’d burn into the reader’s mind would be enough to completely incinerate the brain of a common man. It’d be best not to read it if you wish to stay safe.”

Subaru: “Then don’t shove it in people’s faces! That’s super scary!”

Learning that his breakthrough plan was out of his reach, Subaru’s spirits nosedived.

Seeing him shove the magical book right back, Echidna, with another wave of her hand, transformed it back into particles of light. Leaving aside the convenience of a book that could be stored away without a bookshelf, Subaru finally grasped the true extent of her knowledge.

By possessing this magical book, there was indeed almost nothing she does not know. But to avoid using it just because of personal preference, perhaps only a Witch would think this way.

Subaru: “But if you already know, then that should make things easier. Say, Echidna. You know that I can... Return b...”

—Return by Death.

Just as he was about to pronounce those words, Subaru’s throat froze.

But it was not due to the same non-negotiable penalty that visited every time he tried to utter the forbidden words.

In front of the frozen Subaru, Echidna was merely waiting for his next words, her white hair swaying in the wind, silently waiting.

Sitting there, she looked nothing like a Witch. There was something almost resembling warmth and sympathy, and the more he felt this way, the faster his heart pounded and the heavier his tongue became.

What froze Subaru's voice, was the most primal of emotions— Fear.

Subaru: "Haa... Haa..."

Subaru already had several opportunities to utter the forbidden words in the past.

To utter the name of the Authority, Return by Death, residing in his body.

While it would be difficult to say whether it'd be correct to call it an Authority, whenever he tried to tell anyone else, a force prevented him from doing so. A direct pain would grip his heart leaving no room for resistance, a force unbearable and merciless.

And there was once when its venomous fangs did not fall on Subaru, but on Emilia, to whom he had tried to lay bare his heart. The grief and pain of loss of that moment, Subaru could never forget.

There were very few occasions when Subaru so sincerely desired to die, and to simply disappear.

It was not the only time that the bitter, indescribable regret of his own stupidity had weighed so heavily upon him. But despite that misery and regret— his heart, gripped by terror, still lacked the courage to take even a single step.

It was not that he was afraid of the pain that would be dealt to his heart. Of course, pain was frightening, but if it was the necessary price on the path to the desired future, then he would grit his teeth and endure it.

However, what Subaru feared was that if he uttered the forbidden words, the dark fingers would turn on someone other than himself.

No. Subaru shook his head.

In the battle against the White Whale, and in the final showdowns with Petelgeuse, Subaru had managed to utter the forbidden words when no one else was present.

Otherwise, he would always be forcibly stopped before he could reveal the secret to others, and his words would simply be discarded from the world in which time stood still. Because of that, he was never questioned further.

And the black hand of the Witch never made a sacrifice of anyone who wished to hear the continuation of those words.

—Except Emilia.

Subaru: “———”

The memories returned, of the silver-haired girl lying lightly in his arms.

If he were to taste that sense of loss again, this time, it would surely be unbearable.

It was a good thing he didn’t go insane back then, he thought. After killing Emilia, wandering aimlessly, holding her lifeless corpse in his arms, it was a good thing he didn’t go insane back then.

So unforgivable was his sin. And so terrible his crime.

And so, gripped by fear, Subaru hesitated to say the words.

Before him was the Witch Echidna. Frankly, she was no comparison to Emilia, so shallow was her acquaintance to Subaru.

Even if her heart was crushed, he probably wouldn’t feel the same loss and despair of that moment. That was his hideous prediction. But still, Subaru couldn’t move. Because while he was entertaining that naive train of thought, he realized that the conditions were far too different, and the results far too unpredictable.

When mentioning Return by Death to an unknowing listener, the forbidden words dealt pain to Subaru’s heart.

And when Subaru mentioned Return by Death to someone precious to him, the forbidden words crushed that precious person's heart.

But what would happen if Subaru were to reveal Return by Death to someone who had already found out through some other means?

Would the suffering end with Subaru, or would the demonic hand extend to the one in front of him—

Echidna: "Why don't you try it and see?"

Subaru: "———!?"

Echidna: "Taking action to procure the results one desires, is deserving of my respect. I am not going to veer from that opinion. In fact, I believe it is precisely such actions that make life worth living."

Was she unaware of the cause of Subaru's indecision, or was it because she didn't know that she herself could become the target— No, that would be impossible.

Most likely, the Witch had already seen through all of Subaru's doubts.

Even though he himself could not reach a conclusion, the Witch understood. Yet, in spite of this, she urged him to go on for no other reason than a conviction from the depths of her heart.

Subaru: "You might not have time to regret it, you know...?"

Echidna: "Then, let me wait with eager expectations for you to break down crying beside my corpse."

Seeing Subaru trying to delay the choice to the last minute, Echidna cheerfully answered.

That attitude was probably to remove any remaining concerns hindering him from making his decision.

Rather than doing so out of consideration for Subaru, it was probably her desire to see the outcome— That was the basis of the sincerity of her words.

Without expectations, and without hoping for one or the other. There was merely possibility. And for only the desire of the possibility of an answer, she pushed on Subaru's back.

She must be living without the slightest doubt of the reason of her existence.

Even though he knew there was no way to live on that alone, he nonetheless felt saved by that strength.

Subaru: “Echidna. I can use Return by Death t—”

The forbidden words escaped his lips—

And, in that instant, the world—

Arc 4 Chapter 45 - Conditions for the Tea Party

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 11, Chapter 5 “The Witches’ Tea Party”, Parts 2 (last third)-3

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Parts 2+3](#)

Subaru: “—To.”

Eyes tightly shut, Subaru clenched his teeth in anticipation of the impending fingers of shocking pain. But this anguished determination was,

Subaru: “...Huh?”

Despite pronouncing the words, none of the changes came to Subaru’s body.

Subaru: “...Hm.”

Lifting his head, Subaru quickly felt his chest to confirm that nothing was out of the ordinary. Directly in front of him, Echidna was still sitting with her legs crossed just as she was a few seconds ago, and only her eyebrows slightly twitched on her perfect features.

Frantically looking her over, he saw that nothing had changed about the girl who was looking back at him. Her breathing, her demeanor— everything was the same as before. But, expecting the worst, his eyes locked onto the center of her chest, shrouded in her funerary dress,

Echidna: “Although I don’t know if they live up to your expectations, personally I’m not very confident in my chest size, you know. I guess if they were the size of Sekhmet’s or Minerva’s, they’d probably be a huge burden on my back and shoulders... But from a curiosity standpoint, I still find it regrettable.”

Subaru: “...That’s totally not the reason why I’m ogling! No, more importantly...”



Illustration from Volume 11, coloring by Xarlasar ([source](#))

Hearing Echidna's statement like it was a matter-of-course, Subaru shot back as if his brain went blank. Then, holding a palm to his mouth, desperately trying to stifle the emotions in his trembling voice,

Subaru: "When... When I die, I rewind time, and do the world over again. I can Return by Death."

Echidna: "I heard you. And before I heard, I read it too. I see, it's quite a rare situation indeed."

Carefree as ever, as if having completely accepted the facts of Subaru's statement, Echidna nodded. But, to Subaru, this attitude was nothing short of thunder striking on a clear day.

—At the end of his last syllable as he pronounced the words, no matter how much he reminded his heart to stay strong, his determination would easily have been destroyed under the unrelenting punishment of the Witch's hand.

The pain that would result whenever he trespassed on the forbidden, dealt either to Subaru's heart or the heart of the person he was confessing to, had always been the unshakable trauma binding his heart.

That was why, to Subaru, even attempting was out of the question. If not for Echidna's push on his back, Subaru would not have possessed the final resolve to follow through.

He had done so with such momentous determination. And yet, it was so easily—

Subaru: "Why didn't the hand come out...?"

Echidna: "You sound almost disappointed that it didn't. In that case, could it be that you regret having missed an opportunity to kill me? I'm hurt."

Subaru: "I obviously wasn't banking on that sort of...!"

Echidna: "Yes, I know. Are you feeling so cornered that you can't even take a little joke?"

Ignoring Subaru's emotions wavering under the shock, Echidna simply went on at her own pace. Unable to hold back his frustration, Subaru clicked his tongue and shot her a sharp glare,

Subaru: "Then answer me clearly. You... heard me say Return by Death several times now, and the hand that was supposed to... That Witch's hand won't be coming? Am I right in thinking that?"

Echidna: “So you already understand that hand belongs to that Witch... Yes, that is correct. This is my dream, and my Citadel. A fantasy seen in my death. No one may enter here without my permission.”

Subaru: “You’re sure of that?”

Echidna: “You certainly are cautious— Yes, I’m sure. The only Witches whose existences are permitted here are Greed, Gluttony, Lust, Pride, Wrath, and Sloth. There is no place for Envy here.”

Seeing Subaru insisting on making sure, Echidna replied.

Hearing this, for a moment Subaru forgot to breathe. A short while passed as he sat silently in his chair, limp and powerless. His shoulders dropped, his face stooped, and he let out a long, long sigh,

Subaru: “Is that, so... that so... Is, that so...”

Echidna: “———”

Covering his face with his palm, Subaru repeated the same words under his breath. Over, and over.

As if just to make sure. As if unwilling to let it go. As if clinging onto it.

After all, whether it was being freed from the Witch’s fingers or finally spilling the forbidden words stowed deep inside his chest, all of it was a first since he arrived in this parallel world.

Echidna: “That is certainly a profound expression you’re making.”

Watching Subaru being tossed by waves of emotions, Echidna’s delicate lips softened as she spoke. Passing her fingers through her pure white hair,

Echidna: “Was that how much it has been tormenting you? Then again, having this kind of obsessive love directed at you, I guess it’s only inevitable.”

Subaru: “Sorry... I got a bit carried away there. I’m fine now... Yeah, I’m fine now. I’m fine now, so let’s keep going. There’s still a mountain of things I want to talk to you about.”

The constraint on speaking of Return by Death did not activate.

It took a considerable amount of time just to come to terms with that fact, but even now that he had accepted it, his heart was still no less turbulent.

The burden he had carried up to now, the burden he was still carrying, the sense of liberation of finally being able to say it out loud— were like a light of hope injected into this stifling deadlock. But,

Echidna: “There’s something you seem to be misunderstanding.”

Subaru: “—?”

Echidna: “It is true that the Witch’s hand cannot intervene inside my Citadel. So, I do understand your heart’s jubilation at finally being able to reveal the secret that you were barred from revealing up to now. But... as to whether I should listen to your problems and just so conveniently offer my help and advice, that would be a separate question entirely, wouldn’t it?”

Subaru: “Ugh...”

Subaru’s excitement was instantly doused like he was splashed by a bucket of cold water.

In front of the silenced Subaru, Echidna made an expression as if her statement was only a matter of course. Faced with this unexpected response, Subaru couldn’t hide the confusion and discouragement on his face.

His gaze wavered as unintelligible sounds of “ah” and “ugh” leaked from his mouth. Just when he thought he saw the light and felt the sense of liberation in anticipation of breaking through the impasse, he let it slip right through his fingers. What should he do now? He had no idea at this point,

Echidna: “If you keep making that face like an abandoned child, I’ll feel troubled, you know. Besides, I wasn’t going to ask for anything too difficult of you.”

Saying this, she tilted her head with a troubled look and lightly tapped three taps on the white table with her extended finger. Drawn by the sound, Subaru’s gaze landed on the place where her tapping finger was pointing— It was the cup he hadn’t touched since he got here.

Echidna: “You were invited to a Witch’s tea party. If you intend to carry on a lively conversation over tea, shouldn’t you show that you’ve accepted my invitation first?”

Subaru: "...I... am not sure what you're—"

Echidna: "I thought it couldn't be any clearer than that? I even pointed this out at the beginning, you know."

With that reminder, Subaru remembered that Echidna did voice her complaint about Subaru not getting into the mood of the tea party and refusing to even look at his tea.

Realizing that this was her revenge, Subaru sustained major damage to his heart, and,

Subaru: "Damn it! Understood!"

Snatching up the cup from the table, he drank down the swirling amber-colored liquid in a single gulp. Despite having been left there for quite some time, its warmth was still just right. Perhaps, that was only to be expected of the offerings of a Witch's tea party.

Having gulped it down faster than he could taste it, Subaru roughly wiped his dripping mouth with his sleeve,

Subaru: "There! I drank it! Now do you feel like accepting me as a member of the tea party?"

Echidna: "You drank up my bodily fluid with such eagerness... Oh, I'm going to blush."

Subaru: "Uueegggghh I forgot—!!"

And Subaru was caught on the same Dona Tea trap he had stepped on at their first tea party.

Cheerfully watching Subaru as he held his hand to his mouth trying not to vomit, a delicate, lovely smile was inscribed onto Echidna's cheeks, as if to say, "You are accepted",

Echidna: "For your inquiry of «why», you are qualified, and the doors of this tea party are open to you. And, by drinking the tea offered by a Witch, you are accepted as an honored guest. As the host of this tea party, I am obliged to welcome you— Now, you may ask away."

Echidna lightly clapped, with brimming curiosity blazing radiantly in her eyes.

Echidna: "After all, to agonize the mind in search of an answer is the greatest of bliss to me."

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—With this, the tea party, or rather the question and answer session, began.

The Witch Echidna possessed tremendous knowledge in the form of a book she called the Memories of the World.

He hadn't been able to even mention Return by Death to anyone up to now. But to suddenly be able to speak of the information gained from this ability without constraints was simply the utmost blessing Subaru could have hoped for.

In front of her, all the countless belated questions pent up inside him flooded to the surface. But the first that came to his lips was,

Subaru: "The one who allows me to Return by Death... is the Witch of Envy, isn't it?"

Echidna: "More or less, you're not wrong in that understanding. But as for the mechanisms behind Return by Death, I wouldn't know unless I have personally observed your death. But, since you cannot lose your life in my Citadel, that condition could never be fulfilled."

Subaru: "As long as I'm here, I can't die?"

Echidna: "This is only a fleeting dream, a temporary perch of the soul. If you died inside a dream, do you believe your real body would die as well?"

Subaru: "Well, if the dream got really bad, it's possible I might die of shock or something..."

Tropes like deaths in dreams being reflected in real life showed up quite a lot in fictional works. With all those stories as examples, Subaru got the feeling that it wouldn't be all that strange if dying in a Witch's mental realm could cause his real body to die as well.

Subaru: "Well, it would be kinda weird to keep insisting on dying when I'm already told that I can't. Anyways, so basically I won't have to worry about dying no matter what kind of stupid stuff I do here?"

Echidna: "If your mind was pulverized and scattered to dust before you return to your physical body, you might still end up a cripple."

Subaru: “If I become a living corpse I might as well be dead... If I can’t Return by Death from that, that’s even worse, isn’t it!”

Subaru once came to the verge of mental collapse during the loops inside the Capital. Perhaps it was a self-defense mechanism, or an unconscious act to prevent himself from truly shattering. He didn’t know what it was that swept him along at that time, but, in the end, it was only through rage that he had been able to regain himself.

Nevertheless, Subaru somehow instinctively knew that if his mind were shattered here, no sort of shock therapy would be able to cure him.

Subaru: “If I can’t even choose the timing of my own death, there’d really be nothing worse than that... Although honestly, not dying would still be the preferred option.”

Echidna: “I can’t judge the virtue of a mindset which would think of death as a tool to procure victory. For not even I have experienced my own death and committed it to the stores of my knowledge.”

Subaru: “...? But, you died and got turned into a ghost. You don’t remember your own death?”

She was dead and without a physical body, that was what she herself had explained to him. Only the soul of the deceased Echidna was sealed and confined here by the Divine Dragon Volcanica.

Echidna: “It wasn’t quite like that. Indeed, my physical body, the vessel of my soul is dead and gone. But my soul was sealed by Volcanica before it could meet its death.”

Subaru: “...So then, your body died, and your soul didn’t. And since your essence didn’t die, it’s slightly different from actually experiencing death?”

Echidna: “Precisely. So while it may be a selfish thought, I am actually quite jealous of your situation. To be able to observe your own death, and not only once, but to taste it many times over, no one would ever have permitted me such an opportunity.”

Subaru: “...That sounds awfully masochistic depending on how you hear it. And it’s not like I just went around happily welcoming death, you know, not even once.”

She probably didn’t mean anything by it, but Subaru nonetheless cringed at Echidna’s morbid curiosity.

For Subaru, death at the end of his actions only ever proved his failure to achieve his objectives.

His aversion to death had never diminished, and this sentiment had not changed since the first time he experienced it. Although, Subaru couldn't deny that he had grown somewhat accustomed to that sensation, and was becoming more capable of facing it.

In front of Subaru's sentiment, Echidna only let slip a little laugh, "That's a terrible way to put it",

Echidna: "Your condition which allows you to retry after death, or rather, the power which denies you the peace of death, there is no doubt that it is related to Envy. When did you notice it?"

Subaru: "From all the things everyone's told me, it's pretty much implied that the Witch had something to do with it. Although I honestly don't remember ever meeting the envious Witch-sama herself... Seeing how her name keeps popping up whenever something happens, I can only imagine maybe she's the hand model who shows up now and then."

Two arms, and a black shadow forming the vague outline of a body was all he had ever seen.

A contradictory existence which at once tormented Subaru with pain and showered him with intense love whenever he spoke the forbidden words. Tormenting, and loving, a deranged sadistic delusion which Subaru had never considered to be a blessing.

Subaru: "Why would she care so much about someone she's never met before, I can't understand it at all... Can you?"

Echidna: "Well, who knows. It's not just me, I doubt anyone would be able to understand her mentality. In fact, even if I could, I wouldn't wish to."

Subaru: "For someone who wants to know everything in this world, you seem awfully bitter when it comes to the Witch of Envy. Actually, considering what she's done to you, I guess it's only natural."

In Subaru's mind, Echidna was something transcendent, and in fact, she had reached heights no humans could have ever hoped to reach.

She had created a whole other world, preserved her likeness even after death, and possessed the knowledge to answer any question Subaru could possibly ask.

All of which were proof of the transcendental nature of the girl who was the Witch of Greed.

But even this transcendental existence could not escape the emotions of love and hatred. It was not something Subaru could change, and he couldn't help but feel powerless in that sense.

Echidna: "You seem to have overestimated me. I may be a Witch, but I was a human first. I am not free from pleasure and rage, sadness and joy, nor the love and hatred of things, nor whether I can get along with a person or not. Compared to the other Witches, however, I do pride myself in the fact that I am far more tolerant."

Subaru: "Well you said it yourself that your curiosity about others is endless, guess there's no way to satisfy that curiosity by being too picky about people."

Echidna: "Precisely. And so, I can tolerate the existence of most things. No matter how unseemly or vulgar the existence, I'd still believe there is reason to endeavor to understand its mind to a certain degree. To satisfy my desire to know all things. However,"

Pausing her words there, Echidna's expression suddenly darkened.

The Witch, who always carried an easy smile as she watched him with her unforgettable gaze, for the first time, he saw the corners of her lips twisted with clear displeasure—and brooding rage,

Echidna: "The Witch of Envy is the exception. Only her, I cannot forgive, nor will I endeavor to do so. Whether it was in the time before my death or the time after my death or out of all the Memories of the World, I have never met an existence so unforgivable."

Subaru: "...It's not just because she killed you... is it. This kind of rage..."

Echidna: "Death doesn't hold that much significance to me. When you consider that I'm here like this. But as far as I'm concerned, she did something far more intolerable. Even though I consider any action taken to be an effort to obtain a conclusion... this alone, I absolutely will never accept."

Expelling this bitter sentiment, Echidna closed her eyes and shook her head.

With this one gesture, all traces of passionate rage dissipated and vanished from her face. Emerging in its stead, was once again the familiar, perceptive smile,

Echidna: “Let’s put aside the topic of that Witch for now. I do have some speculations regarding the underlying principles of your Return by Death, but I don’t have conclusive proof. And even if we could understand it, it would have no impact on your actual deaths at all. So, do you have any question for me other than its origins?”

Subaru: “Other than its origins...”

Having the root of Return by Death so easily confirmed actually forced Subaru’s mind to deliberate. Setting the intentions of its originator aside, Subaru was aware that in exchange for the pain, he was making good use of this powerful Authority residing within him, if he wasn’t being used by it.

As much as he hated to admit it, without this power, there would be so many outcomes that he could never have achieved.

And, most likely, he would have no choice but to continue relying on its power in the future. If that much was given, then,

Subaru: “—My Return by Death... do you think there’s a limit to how many times it can be used?”

Echidna: “Hmm... I see. Knowing that you could retry after death, that would be the natural question to ask.”

As far as Subaru could remember, he had already died sixteen times in this world. Every single death had been accompanied by agony and loss, but, savoring that pain, he would try again in the world he returned to.

Yet, even while it allowed him to reach for the outcomes he needed, every time he was visited by death was accompanied by the natural terror— that it might be the last time.

Subaru: “It’s only natural... isn’t it.”

After all, death was supposed to happen only once in the first place, and he had already defied it so many times over.

Precisely because this was a world he could not overcome without that power, he couldn’t help but imagine how unbearably powerless he would feel if he were to ever lose it.

Until the instant Return by Death hit, Subaru couldn't know whether it would truly be the end.

The despair of having failed partway to his goal, which he had tasted so many times before— Would all cease and give way to this. So terrible was the dread of death.

Echidna: "What I am about to say is purely my conjecture, so let me put this out there first. I do have some vague ideas regarding the principles behind your Return by Death, so I hope you'd allow me to proceed from these assumptions."

Subaru: "...Yeah, let's hear it."

Echidna: "Your Return by Death, while we can assume that it comes with limits and conditions, in terms of a limit on the number of uses—"

Subaru held his breath.

Looking directly into Echidna's eyes just as they were gazing into his, to Subaru, the small pause in between those words felt like an eternity.

And to this anxiety to reach the answer—

Echidna: "—there probably isn't one."

Subaru: "..."

Echidna: "To you, death is not the end. No matter how many times you die, or how many times you decay, your soul is sent back in time and you are granted the chance to retry until the fate of death is broken. Regardless of how brutally you are killed, and no matter how shattered your heart may be, it seems."

Hearing Echidna's conclusion, for a moment, Subaru's mind was replaced by a complete blank.

As if his mind was wiped clean by that blankness, the next thought that began to fill his emptied head was,

Subaru: "—Is that, so."

Quietly taking in the fact he had just been told, he desperately tried to keep his whole body from trembling.

Covering a hand over his mouth, Subaru lowered his head and closed his eyes. He did not seem to be distraught, but neither was he calmed by the knowledge that there was no limit to his Return by Death.

Seeing this, Echidna furrowed her brows with some traces of doubt,

Echidna: “You don’t look as surprised as I thought.”

Subaru: “...”

Echidna: “I had thought that for you... Or indeed, for anyone, overturning the absolute finality of death should have been something exceedingly significant. Especially when you yourself are powerless, while countless obstacles and dangers stand ahead of your path. I really thought there would’ve been a bigger reaction than that.”

Subaru: “Sorry the bad *hannou*¹²¹ didn’t live up to your expectations... but...”

The possibility of unlimited retries— had always been one of Subaru’s rather optimistic theories about Return by Death. So, when someone else gave it their affirmation, it did not come as a complete surprise. But even so,

Subaru: “It’s not like I’m just gonna take that in and immediately think «It’s alright to die as many times as I want, this parallel world is totally just a game» or anything idiotic like that.”

Echidna: “So you’ve already guessed what the answer would be? You are a cleverer human than I thought. For better or for worse.”

Subaru: “Every time I Return by Death... and every time I try to tell anyone about it, I can feel the Witch’s presence, like a black shadow is drawing closer.”

¹²¹ English flip. Means “reaction” (反応), originally “リアクション” (reaction).

The first time he spoke the forbidden words, all Subaru could see of the shadow was an arm touching his heart. But the more he violated the forbidden, the more vivid the shadow's faint outlines became, and now, he could already faintly see the shape of its entire body.

And when the shape of that shadow becomes clear, what would happen then?

Subaru: "When it becomes completely formed, that's when I'll have reached the limit of Return by Death. When that shadow becomes real, I don't think I will be able to reject it."

Echidna: "Hm, and what is your basis for this?"

Subaru: "A hunch."

Hearing these two words, Echidna's eyes opened wide.

Subaru rested his elbow on the table and his cheek in his palm, looking up at Echidna's face,

Subaru: "In fact, it's a feeling which only someone who's seen that shadow can understand. Besides me, the only other guy who's seen that thing was..."

The only other person who shared in this pain, was probably that madman who had his heart broken in half when he did.

Subaru felt an emotional twinge in his chest. And seeing this, Echidna narrowed her eyes as if peering into the depths of his heart, but then, she immediately shrugged,

Echidna: "The fact that I can't understand this feeling of yours is all itching me up inside, but that's largely confirmed my speculations. There is no limit to your Return by Death. However, it is subject to certain conditions."

Subaru: "Certain... conditions."

Echidna: "What enables you to Return by Death, is the deranged will of the Witch. Unless the source of that delusion is severed, you will not be allowed to meet your end."

Subaru: "What do you mean sever... the source of the delusion..."

Echidna: “By killing the Witch who has fallen for you to this extent, or having the Witch’s love for you run dry... Although, as I see it, both of these tasks seem to be difficult to the extreme.”

To kill the Witch of Envy— Four hundred years ago, that had been the universal wish which even the combined strengths of the Dragon, the Sage, and the Sword Saint had failed to accomplish.

Unable to kill her, they had only managed to seal the Witch of Envy who had covered half the world in shadow. Yet, what Subaru had to do would have to surpass even this monumental feat.

Subaru: “Feels like I’ll have a much easier time having her fall out of love with me...”

Echidna: “But that is absolutely impossible to accomplish. Surely, you must be able to see this?”

Subaru: “...”

Echidna: “Perhaps only you could understand the sensation of directly interacting with the Witch’s shadow, but I, having known that thing in its former existence, cannot help but think so.”

There was bitterness in Echidna’s expression. Although he didn’t know what kind of conflict arose between these two Witches four-hundred years ago, it certainly wasn’t something that faded with time. In fact, the passage of time seemed to have only deepened the rift.

Unable to refute her words, Subaru only exhaled through his nose and leaned into the back of his chair.

Just as Echidna said, the likelihood of the Witch of Envy giving up on Subaru— was as hopeless as it could be.

Subaru never imagined he would be loved so blindly by someone whose face he didn’t even know. Someone who literally destroyed half the world.

Echidna: “You sure accepted it easily.”

Subaru: “—Huh?”

Echidna: “It might be strange to say this, but everything I’ve said up to now had only been the sum of my conjectures. I cannot support it with proof, nor is there nearly enough material to make it convincing.”

Echidna closed a single eye, apparently perplexed by why Subaru so readily accepted her opinions.

In fact, Subaru felt the same way.

Subaru hadn't known her for all that long, and not to mention that the other person was a Witch. With that in mind, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that there wasn't a single reason to trust her. But,

Subaru: "That's also my hunch, I guess."

Echidna: "...Hunch."

Subaru realized that, for some reason, he just naturally felt inclined to believe whatever came out of this girl's mouth.

Perhaps it was her respect for knowledge, and her openness with what she knew in the brief conversations he has had with her, that made him so inclined to believe her.

Out of her excessive thirst for knowledge, he had seen her do such impulsive or even outlandish things, and yet—

Subaru: "If I overlook those parts, you probably wouldn't lie to me— I think."

Echidna: "...Is that also a hunch of yours?"

Subaru: "Yeah. A hunch. But then, the fact that you're hearing this from a guy who's died sixteen times pretty much discredits it right off the bat, huh."

Hoping to lighten the mood, Subaru threw out that self-deprecating quip and scratched his head.

Hearing this, for a moment, Echidna held her breath. Then, she reached for the cup on the table, brought it to her lips, and allowed the liquid to pass across her tongue,

Echidna: "You might just have a talent for flirting with Witches, you know."

And, for the first time, a completely different smile was carved into the corners of her lips.

Arc 4 Chapter 46 - Locusts

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 11, Chapter 5 “The Witches’ Tea Party”, Part 4

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

Seeing the smile that was directed at him, for the very first time, Subaru genuinely thought that Echidna was pretty cute.

In her softened, smiling lips, there was no irony or calculation, but only a pure expression of good will towards Subaru. There was no doubt that she was attractive, and to be treated so warmly by a girl like that should be enough to open the hearts of any boy alive.

Though of course, the most important space inside Subaru’s heart was occupied by two other girls already.

Subaru: “Still, there really was some heart flutter going on there...”

Echidna: “Did you say something?”

Subaru: “Even if I have talent for flirting with Witches, I still got loads of problems you know. And having someone I don’t even remember flirting with attached to me... Ah, but then, if you six Witches can give me some help outside without causing too much trouble, I’d be pretty happy with that.”

Turning his face away and trying to change the subject, Subaru muttered this convenient pipe dream.

While he had only witnessed a part of what Typhon and Minerva could do, that part alone should already be more than enough to have the damage-dealer and healer roles covered.

Although, one moment getting his arm lopped off and the other getting beaten into health was still something to think about.

Echidna: “Unfortunately, regardless of what I was when I was alive, I cannot interfere with the real world after death. So, inviting you into my dream is already quite an exception.”

Subaru: “I know I know. I just thought I should try anyway. Honestly, just having you to listen to me is already more than enough of a salvation for me.”

At the very least, having finally let go of the secret he had been holding inside for so long, he was feeling a little further away from mental collapse. On top of that, he had managed to clear up some of his suspicions about the Witch of Envy as well.

As for the parts that were still mysteries, he decided not to think about them for now. Instead,

Subaru: “Can I ask some other questions about Return by Death?”

Echidna: “I could only answer with speculations from the extent of my knowledge. If you are fine with that, then sure.”

Resuming a pretentious air, Echidna said this as a preface.

The expression on her face was almost reminiscent of some big-shot figure, but deep down, she must be thoroughly enjoying these questions and answers seeing she was impatiently tapping her feet on the grass in anticipation of Subaru’s words while fiddling her fingers in her own hair.

For someone who was supposed to be the Incarnation of the Thirst for Knowledge, she was really quite predictable. Is it really alright for someone like that to be a Witch? Subaru thought in a corner of his head.

Subaru: “Occasionally when I Return by Death, the place where I revive at is changed. So far, there’s been... six places, I think? I’ve been revived at different location and their respective times. So... I want to know about the conditions for the *kanmon*¹²² to change.”

Echidna: “*Kanmon*... you mean the change in the places where you revive?”

¹²² English flip. Means “checkpoint” (関門), originally “セーブポイント” (savepoint). Previously, Kadomon was referred to similarly.

Subaru: “Basically, once it changes, I can’t go back to the previous point. If two days ago was a savepoint, then once it changes to yesterday, I can’t go back to the day before anymore. Do you know what’s the mechanism behind this?”

To Subaru, this question was just as vital as the limit on the number of returns, if not more so.

The changes in the savepoints— was an unknown aspect of Return by Death for which Subaru couldn’t find a single relevant condition.

Subaru: “I can die and come back... But it’s not like I intend to naively go around thinking I can die as much I want. But while I don’t intend to... when it’s the only thing I can rely on, I’ll rely on it without hesitation. But...”

What would Subaru do when he falls into a situation which even his death couldn’t salvage?

The image of the unconscious Rem lying in her bed flickered across Subaru’s mind.

After parting at the end of the battle with the White Whale, she was supposed to join him again once he had defeated Petelgeuse, and yet, Subaru couldn’t save her even through Return by Death.

He could never forget the instant he thrust a knife into his own throat at the sleeping girl’s side.

Even now, he couldn’t believe that he had had the will to act on that short-circuited impulse to take his own life, crushed by despair. Or, perhaps, it was precisely because he had lost the will to go on that he took his own life.

With blood leaking from the hole in his throat, in pain and suffocation, Subaru died. And when he opened his eyes, he found himself returned to only a few minutes before he pierced his throat.

He had never hated a savepoint update as much as he did then.

If it meant not losing Rem, Subaru would have challenged the White Whale and the madman as many times as he must. No matter how many times he would have to die, how many times he would be crushed, he would have challenged again.

Echidna: “The circumstances of those savepoint changes, could you tell me in a little more detail?”

Subaru: “Ah, aah... Right. I’ll start with the first savepoint then...”

Recalling the memories of what he was being asked, Subaru gave a brief explanation of each of his Return by Deaths, along with the times and places he returned to.

That is to say, the majority of the experience of his life in the parallel world up to now. Even though it was the shortened version, getting through the story of the eventful two months still took up what felt like an hour.

Subaru: “So now, it’s inside the Tomb... It was set to be right after the end of the First Trial. Going by what you said earlier, this time was the same as well.”

Echidna: “...”

Subaru: “Did that give you anything? One time, I was pretty convinced of a crazy theory that old uncles are savepoints, you know.”

For whatever reason, Kadomon, the scar faced uncle in the fruit shop in the Capital, was twice selected to be Subaru’s savepoint in this world.

But then again, one could count it as being twice in front of Rem as well.

Subaru: “I get the feeling that whether it’s people, things or time, none of it has anything to do with the savepoint changes. In terms of time, the number of days in between are all over the place, and in terms of people or events I can’t see anything in common at all. The conditions are just totally obscure.”

Echidna: “Indeed, I don’t see any consistency in the conditions you mentioned either. In that case, perhaps it is necessary for us to approach it from a different angle.”

Subaru: “A different angle?”

Echidna: “What is the reason you returned to where you did... might not be a question that would lead us to the answer. Instead, why don’t we consider a reason why it would be moved forward?”

Subaru: “Why it would be moved forward...?”

Echidna: “This savepoint, instead of a «place of return», could alternatively be considered a «wall of return». Until it can be moved forward, you would always be pulled back to that wall through death. You could also think of it as the bottom of a pit.”

Subaru furrowed his brows at Echidna’s words, and began to think on their meaning.

A wall, or a pit. By returning to the respawn point through Return by Death, Subaru had managed to change situations that would otherwise have been impossible to break through. Rather, without Return by Death, he would not have surmounted anything, and those situations would have ended as they were.

So, the locations of the savepoints of Return by Death changed with the situation. In other words,

Subaru: “Return by Death shifts when I change something that I couldn’t change before...?”

Echidna: “In this case, Return by Death is merely a means to an end. As for what intention is behind this means, we would have to consider the being responsible for its existence.”

Subaru: “The being responsible...”

Echidna nodded, seeing that Subaru had lost his words, as her lips bent into a resentful frown,

Echidna: “The Witch of Envy. The Witch who gifted you with Return by Death did so in hopes that you would change the circumstances which could only be overcome through death. When you succeed in overcoming those circumstances, the savepoint will change.”

Subaru: “B, but then... that, doesn’t make sense. Because, then... what about Rem? I failed to save her, didn’t I? If Return by Death is a force to change the circumstances, then why did I return to a time where I couldn’t save Rem...”

By overwriting the savepoint, it was Return by Death itself that had denied him the chance to save Rem. It was precisely because of this, that Subaru so urgently need to know if the update to the savepoint could be reverted.

But, to Subaru’s question, Echidna continued with “Unfortunately”,

Echidna: “Rem, this person you speak of, is probably not someone who is within the Witch of Envy’s considerations.”

Subaru: "...Ah."

Echidna: "What the Witch of Envy desires is for you to escape from the confounding fates of inescapable dead ends. Return by Death is only a means to fulfill that purpose, and whatever fate anyone else suffers is beyond the scope of that intention. Wishing to use that power to save anyone else, is nothing more than your own personal desires. It has nothing to do with the Witch."

Subaru: "Ah..."

Echidna: "So, let me make this clear."

In front of Subaru who was stunned into silence, Echidna reiterated her words.

With a feeble gaze in his eyes, Subaru looked up at the Witch of white. And, Echidna closed her eyes only once, as if bearing the pain, before her black pupils pierced into Subaru's,

Echidna: "As long as you fail to break through the obstacles standing in your path and die without changing the future, your soul will surely be returned to my Tomb. But if you allowed far too many sacrifices, and yet managed to change the future..."

Subaru: "—Then I'll never get a chance to regain what's been sacrificed."

Echidna: "...Precisely."

In the end, the only one within the Witch of Envy's considerations was Subaru himself.

As long as Subaru could overcome the fate of death, everything else was trivial. She believed that no matter how hopeless the situation became, given infinite retries, Subaru would find a way to survive. Or rather, even if it was hopeless, Subaru would not be allowed to give up.

Because all the conditions of Return by Death were held in the Witch of Envy's hands.

Subaru: "Alright... If you got such a thing for me, then I've made up my mind as well."

Echidna: "..."

Subaru: "This gift of Return by Death you've given me... I'll use it to the end. And at the end, I'll meet you without having lost a single thing dear to me. Yeah, it's decided. Already decided. I'll make sure of it. I'm the greatest in the world at betraying people's expectations, you know."

If Return by Death was subject to the Witch's will, then Subaru's will would decide how it was to be used.

So, he will pile it up, overcome it, and move forward while holding onto everything.

If the Witch's love would only save Subaru, then Subaru would save everything else.

Only with this, could Natsuki Subaru take a first shot back at the Witch.

Subaru: "Changing the circumstances... means to break through the problems of the Sanctuary and the problems at the mansion. If all those are cleared, then regardless of how many victims are sacrificed, the return point of Return by Death will be updated. In other words, holding onto everything while overcoming the problems is the absolute condition."

Echidna: "It may be strange for me to say this, but isn't that quite an arduous task to take on? You certainly seem to have accepted it easily."

Subaru: "I was just saying out loud something I've already been vaguely thinking about. Rather than break me, it's got my motivation all fired up. My rebellious heart's all ablaze, you know."

Hearing Subaru's declaration, Echidna fell speechless. Taking some small satisfaction in seeing the Witch at a loss for words, Subaru clicked the bones in his neck, and,

Subaru: "There's nothing else I wanted to ask about Return by Death. Anyways, I'll keep that in mind, thanks."

Echidna: "...I've also sated my curiosity through a valuable conversation. So let's call it even. Besides, as opposed to flaunting my knowledge, this was more of me voicing my speculations."

Subaru: "Then, this next one should be properly relying on that knowledge of yours."

Since her knowledge didn't extend to the topic of Return by Death, there were still many ambiguities involved. But this would not be the case for Subaru's next question.

This one, he must hear it loud and clear from her own mouth.

Subaru: "This time I Returned by Death... Do you know how I died?"

Echidna: "I haven't read that part, so no, I don't. And while I am incredibly interested in discussing the experiences of your various deaths... you don't seem to be in the mood right now."

Subaru: "It's kind of hard to be boasting of wounds and deaths and heroic feats without some alcohol. But since all we got here is Dona Tea, that hope's pretty much out the window."

Echidna: "That is unfortunate... From the looks of your body outside, your death must have been accompanied by considerable mental and physical anguish... in the end."

It was probably considerate of her to have avoided describing how he died.

Sensing that consideration, Subaru somewhat relaxed his cheeks, before immediately stiffening again with "Aah yeah", nodding,

Subaru: "Just remembering it gives me the shivers... This time, I was eaten alive."

Echidna: "..."

Subaru: "And it was by these stupid, tiny little palm-sized rabbits. Omnivores and hungry, apparently. They... ate up my whole body without leaving a scrap."

Although he was understating it with his phrasing, there was no way to properly describe that miserable end with words.

The memory of his whole body being devoured, of his flesh, bones and blood being violated by pointed teeth still insisted on pain in the depths of Subaru's mind.

Forcibly pushing this down, Subaru somehow managed to keep himself calm. Seeing this, Echidna pressed the back of her hand against her lips,

Echidna: "...So you encountered the Great Rabbit, I see."

Subaru: "Great Rabbit?"

Echidna: “Great not as in size, but in multitude. That meaning was lost in communication over the ages. It is one of the Witch of Gluttony, Daphne’s, inauspicious legacies— one of three.”

Subaru: “The Great Rabbit is...”

Once, he had heard it from Julius. And here, the name of this Witchbeast was uttered again by Echidna.

White Whale, Black Serpent, and Great Rabbit. All of them being witchbeasts terrorizing the world for four-hundred years, and subjects of the Witch of Gluttony, Daphne.

Subaru: “Just when I thought I got the White Whale down the Great Rabbit shows up, give me a break...”

Echidna: “If your adversary is the Great Rabbit, then you are up against a terrible enemy.”

In front of Subaru, who was holding his head, Echidna’s expression darkened at the knowledge of the threat which he was facing. Subaru was beginning to feel some apprehension at the sight of her expression,

Subaru: “I felt the same anxiety when I was facing the White Whale... So which one is worse?”

Echidna: “In terms of pure combat strength, the White Whale is by far the greater of the two. But in terms of which one is harder to destroy, then it is without doubt the Great Rabbit.”

Subaru: “Hard to destroy...”

Subaru thought that, just like with the White Whale, there must be a way to slay it. But seeing this reaction from Subaru, Echidna raised up a single finger “Are you listening?”,

Echidna: “You may think that it is no different from a regular Witchbeast, or that it is simply a little more troublesome.”

Subaru: “No, I mean, I’ve at least figured out that they’re not the cute little bastards they look like...”

Echidna: “More accurately, the existence of the Great Rabbit is closer to that of a natural disaster. Always acting as a drove, they move for none other than the instinct of their insatiable appetite. All living creatures are their food, and they set out to do nothing except to devour every last morsel of their

feed. Where the Great Rabbit passes, only unpopulated fields remain. Crops and fruits are untouched. The only things they devour are the living.”

Listening to Echidna’s description of the Great Rabbit, Subaru gasped and swallowed back a breath. Watching her stern expression, Subaru realized that she was not exaggerating.

A Sanctuary devoid of people, and the sea of little rabbits that devoured him. If that was the Great Rabbit, then the fact that the Sanctuary was empty could only be because they had all been eaten by the Witchbeast.

Emilia, Ram, Ryuzu, Roswaal, and even Garfiel who had transformed into a giant tiger.

Locusts— The word suddenly surfaced in Subaru’s mind.

The phenomenon where a mass outbreak of locusts appears. More specifically, a mass of grasshoppers morphing into locusts, devouring fields of crops into nothing, leaving devastation and famine in its wake.

The Great Rabbit’s behavior was very close to the locusts Subaru knew.

Although, unlike locusts, the Great Rabbit ate living creatures, and so their inexhaustible hunger threatened life far more directly than the locusts.

Subaru: “Can’t we find a way to defeat them?”

Echidna: “Individually, their strengths are not significant, but do not forget that they move in droves. Killing any number of single individuals is completely meaningless, and as soon as they catch sight of prey, they will not stop until it is dead and devoured. They are hunger itself.”

Subaru: “Wait wait wait. Yeah but... if the rabbits move in droves, shouldn’t there be an *oyabun*¹²³ leading it or something? If we just kill the boss, won’t the whole thing collapse?”

According to the general rules of the human world, killing the leader is usually enough to make a group scatter. Although, in terms of the animal world, the second-in-command might just take over when that happens.

¹²³ English flip. Means "boss/chief/leader" (親分), originally "ボス" (boss).

Then again, Subaru didn't know much about the natural behavior of Witchbeasts, so all he could do was rely on the one who was knowledgeable in this field, Echidna. But there, she shook her head,

Echidna: "You seem to have misunderstood something. The Great Rabbit has no concept of leadership. They are driven only by the instinct of hunger. They consume other life to sate their own hunger, and know no other structure. They reproduce by dividing, and when there is no prey, they cannibalize each other to endure their hunger. There is no sense of companionship between them."

Subaru: "Cannibalize... Wh—why on earth were these monsters created in the first place!?"

Echidna: "Why, that is something only the person who created them would know. At least, Daphne herself isn't as insistent on her appetite as her rabbits are."

Subaru couldn't help but shiver at the dreadful nature of those rabbits.

Certainly, by instinct, it is the natural order of all living organisms to consume other life to sustain their own. On this point, there is no difference between humans or animals, or Witchbeasts, for that matter.

But, to multiply by dividing themselves without mating or raising their young, and even worse, rather than just dividing to increase their number, the fact that they sate their hunger by consuming individuals spawned from themselves was unnatural to the extreme.

It may just be that the Great Rabbit was the organism to end all living organisms.

Subaru: "Hypothetically... Uh, if I had to destroy the Great Rabbit, what do you think I should do?"

Echidna: "To be honest, I think that question is like asking «What should I do to evaporate all the droplets in a rainstorm?»."

"It's impossible to accomplish," must be what she meant.

Hearing Echidna's answer, Subaru held a hand to his forehead, dizzied by the enormity of the hurdle of defeating the Great Rabbit.

Subaru: "If we can kill all of them, then the Great Rabbit will be destroyed, right?"

Echidna: “Yet, that would be far too reckless of a thing to attempt. As far as I know, the only people capable of doing this were Reid Astrea and Sekhmet. Reid could use his overwhelming swordsmanship to slay it to the last one. As for Sekhmet... with the issue of their affinity, she could destroy them in a second.”

Subaru: “I heard they were real monsters... Those two...”

Last time, the memory of Sekhmet sitting there hugging her knees surfaced in his mind.

At least, from what Subaru had seen, his impression of her was someone who found everything to be a bother, a Witch entirely appropriate for the title of Sloth.

Subaru: “Wait...”

Recalling his encounter with Sekhmet, a light lit up in Subaru’s head.

Although it was faint, and fleeting, it was enough to light the way out of the dead-end he was in. More importantly, this was something he absolutely couldn’t do without Echidna’s help.

Subaru: “Echidna.”

Echidna: “What is it? Such a serious expression... No, we mustn’t. You are living, and I am dead. This crossing of our fates is only a transitory fantasy, a fleeting dream. So even if you stare at me with such passionate eyes, I...”

Subaru: “No no sorry to put it to you when you’re all worked up but that’s totally not what I was thinking! Seriously, totally not at all!”

Staggering a bit at seeing Echidna looking somewhat disappointed, Subaru quickly veered the conversation back on topic. That is,

Subaru: “Echidna, I want to meet the Witch of Gluttony— Daphne.”

Echidna: “...”

Subaru: “Last time on your tea party, I met the Witches of Pride, Wrath, and Sloth. But that time you did say you kept the fragments of the five other Witches safe.”

Echidna: "...Collected them, yes. The traces of who they were in life are indeed kept within me. If I release them from this vessel I am, then it would be possible for them to manifest. It is possible, but..."

Hearing Subaru's proposal, Echidna furrowed her brows, looking troubled.

Her gaze wandered and even her words grew indistinct, until she looked to Subaru once again,

Echidna: "I really think it would be best if you abandon the idea of meeting Daphne."

Subaru: "Why is that? I know Witches can be a handful, I've already gotten a pretty thorough taste of that, so I think I'm prepared for it. No matter what happens, I won't complain or anything."

Echidna: "Before we get to complaints, in my opinion, I think your compatibility with Daphne would be extremely terrible. You could even say that it is the worst there can be. Even if you meet her, chances are, you wouldn't be able to discuss anything useful..."

Subaru: "Won't know until I try. Trial and error, as you like to say, right?"

Actions in pursuit of answers. Echidna always said she approved of such endeavors.

Hearing Subaru's words, with an "Ugh...", Echidna showed an expression as if she had just been stabbed in a sore spot. Seeing this from her, Subaru went on, "Besides", scratching his head,

Subaru: "You're the one who said I don't have to worry for my life while I'm in here. Not that I'm being optimistic, but, at least, if I don't have to worry about dying, I figured there's no harm in taking on the challenge."

Echidna: "Well I never said your mind won't break and you won't end up a cripple."

Subaru: "I'll trust you to pull me back before that happens. So please, Echidna? I'm number one in the world when it comes to relying on others, you know?"

Throwing out a joke along with words of trust, Subaru showed his sparkling teeth and shot her a thumbs-up.

Seeing Subaru's frivolous-to-the-end attitude, the colors of resistance gradually faded from Echidna's eyes,

Echidna: "...Alright. I will let you meet Daphne."

Subaru: "Ohoo, thankyouthankyou."

Echidna: "But, I must warn you. Absolutely do not unfasten her restraints. And you are forbidden to make contact with her body. In fact, please avoid making eye contact if possible."

Subaru: "What kind of a creep am I to have to be told to follow all that!"

Besides, there were some words mixed in there that just couldn't be ignored.

But just as Subaru was about to ask— Echidna had already completed her preparations.

Just as last time, Echidna had summoned a Witch without any preliminary motion or foreshadowing. When he blinked and opened his eyes, there was already someone else occupying the space where she had been.

It was all just like last time. Except—

Subaru: "Oy oy... Isn't this just..."

Faced with what had appeared before his eyes, Subaru whispered as his cheeks stiffened.

In front of his eyes, was the Witch of Gluttony, Daphne.

—Set inside a coffin, her entire body restrained by bondage and her eyes sealed behind a thick black blindfold, was the girl who was a Witch.

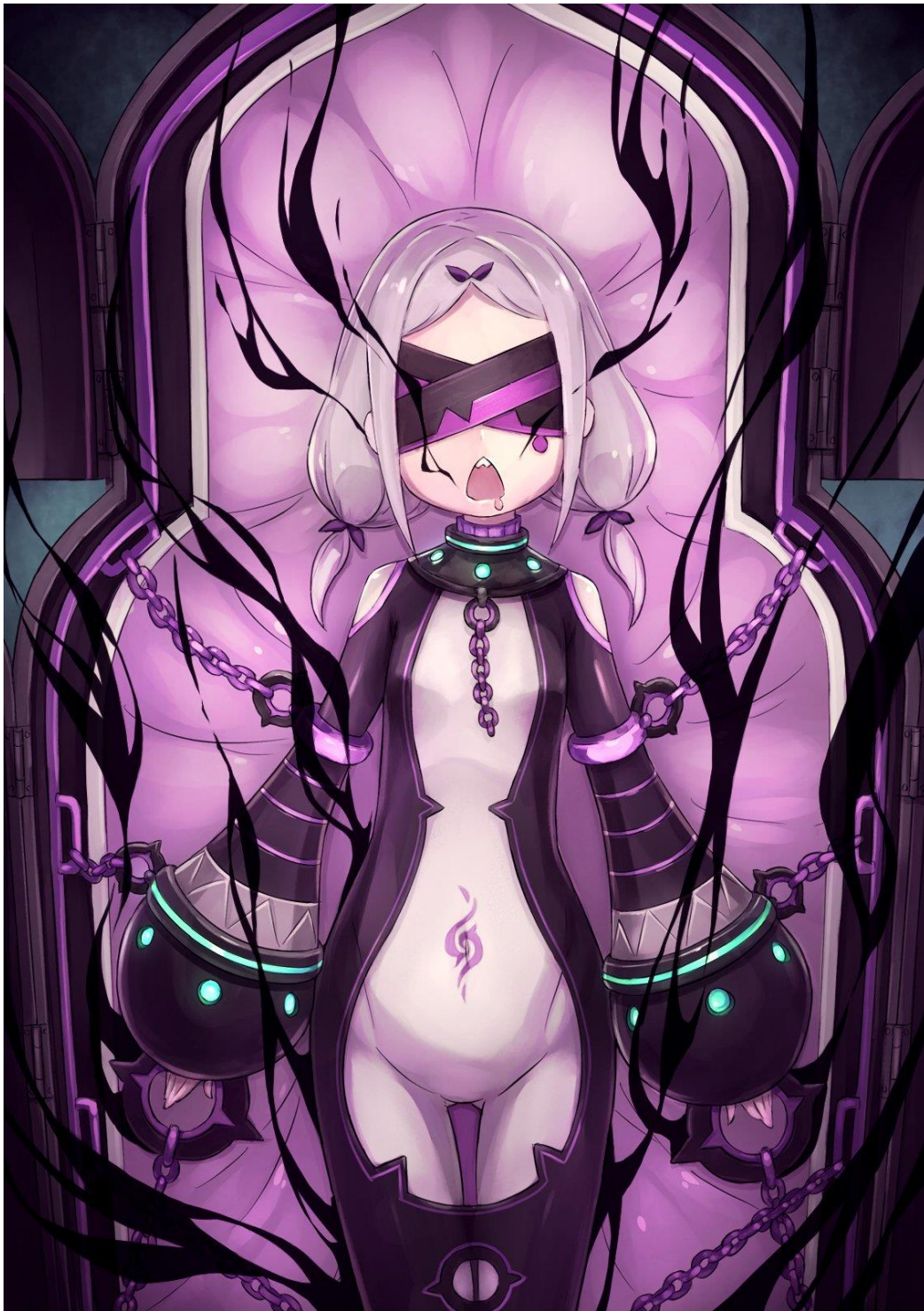


Illustration from Volume 11, coloring by Xarlasar ([source](#))

Arc 4 Chapter 47 - Partners with Bad Affinity

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 11, Chapter 5 “The Witches’ Tea Party”, Part 6 (first half)

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

Subaru: “If I have bad affinity with this, what kind of asshole would have good affinity with this!?”

In front of the girl in complete bondage, Subaru blurted this out in protest.

The Witch of Gluttony— was what they called the person who appeared before him.

Settled inside the slightly tilted coffin was a girl about 150cm in height. Her shoulder-length grayish hair was woven into two pigtails. White and splendid, with small breasts— in fact, she looked no more than thirteen or fourteen years old.

Subaru: “But all tied up in restraints, and eyes blindfolded... it’s hard to believe she’s the age she looks like.”

Girls her age should normally be fantasizing about having superpowers that normal people don’t have or secret latent abilities that can pose a threat to other people, or stuff like that.

Thinking back on his middle-school days, Subaru was fantasizing about being a master of concealed weapons at the time and hid a bunch of sewing needles in his school uniform.

Subaru: “Well, I wound up falling over, got stabbed by needles everywhere and couldn’t stop crying...”

Reminiscing on his cringe-worthy history to no one in particular, Subaru couldn’t quite make up his mind on what to do with the Witch in front of him.

After all, every other Witch up to now had taken the initiative to one-sidedly made the *senseikougeki*¹²⁴ before Subaru could do anything.

Subaru: “———”

Directly facing him, the girl inside the coffin still lay silently without showing any reaction.

Since first impressions are crucial, the silence was beginning to weigh on Subaru, who was finding himself uncharacteristically indecisive about how to break the ice. He at least needed to know if his partner was friendly or not before he could decide whether to be all buddy-buddy or act like a sarcastic twit.

Subaru: “...”

Both waiting for the other to move, silence continued to dominate the tea party atop the small hill.

While this situation persisted, the overwhelming pressure from the Witch in front of him gradually ate away at Subaru. Even with her body immobilized, and her eyes sealed behind blindfolds, the threat emanating from her tiny body was truly befitting of a Witch.

Echidna had so happily introduced him to the Witches of Pride, Wrath and Sloth, yet she hesitated when it came to this one.

Perhaps the Witch of Gluttony, Daphne, was just so decisively different from the others.

Daphne: “...Unn.”

Subaru: “———!?”

Sweat gathered on Subaru’s forehead from the tension, and just as he was about to wipe it with the back of his hand to keep them from dripping into his eyes, a sudden movement from Daphne’s direction gave Subaru a start.

¹²⁴ English flip. Means "pre-emptive strike" (先制攻撃), originally "ファーストアタック" (first attack).

Inside the coffin, the girl wrapped in restraints slightly turned her head, while the sound of her respiration reached Subaru. In anticipation of what she might do, Subaru's entire body assumed a state of caution. And then,

Daphne: "...Zzzuuu... Mmmmmmm."

Subaru: "—You were sleeping!?!?"

Daphne: "—zzzzzzzzuYAAAAA!?"

The moment he heard what sounded like snoring, Subaru jumped forward protesting.

A loud stomp went out over the grassy hill, and, startled by the sudden sound, the Witch inside the coffin jolted, squeaking.

Unable to see with her eyes blindfolded, she turned her head left and right,

Daphne: "Wha, what is it? Somewone was trying to sleep here..."

She drooled out that complaint with an exceptionally sloppy tone.

It was unclear whether she was talking like that because she was half asleep or if that was just the way she talked, but at least the overwhelming pressure from earlier had vanished.

"Was I just overthinking it...?" Subaru couldn't hide this deflated sensation.

Subaru: "Uh, y-yeah, my bad. I got a little hot-headed there. Didn't mean to yell like that."

Daphne: "Ehhhh? But getting startled by stuff like that, Daphne would feel troubled..."

Subaru: "Guh... please forgive me. Cheer up, ok? Please don't get mad."

Daphne: "But I wawsn't getting mad? If I get mad, I'll get all huungry. But anyway, who are you?"

Rejecting his apology, Daphne immediately went on at her own pace to ask her own question.

With just two or three sentences exchanged between them, the rhythm of the conversation had already been all messed up, and Subaru was starting to get an idea of what Echidna meant earlier.

—This Witch’s pace of conversation couldn’t match up with Subaru’s at all.

Letting out a sigh at the unsettling road ahead of him, Subaru lightly shook his head to get rid of the off-put expression on his face, and, replacing it with an ultra-friendly smile,

Subaru: “My name’s Natsuki Subaru. For some reason I got invited by Echidna to her Witch’s tea party... uhh, well, basically a tea-drinking friend. Yeah, something like that.”

Daphne: “Ehhhhhh Dona-Dona has friends? Subaruun too, you should be more careful with your choice of friends, you know? If they hear you’re friends with a Witch... your real friends and family might... hate... you... you know...?”

Hearing Subaru’s self-introduction, Daphne threw in an extra piece of advice. The fact that the latter half of her sentence started trailing off was probably because she was falling back to sleep.

Seeing her blatant exhaustion, with her shoulders heaving up and down inside the coffin, with “Oy oy”, Subaru tried to snap her out of it,

Subaru: “Why’re you so tired out? Does that coffin drain the lifeforce out of whoever’s inside or something?”

Daphne: “Nooo, it doesn’t? Daphne’s just, tired, that’s all, and my stomach’s empty and going all guuguu and I have no energy... is there, anything, to, eat... haa, haa...”

Subaru: “Panting just from talking is like the epitome of childhood-sickly-constitution you know... In terms of food, we only got some Dona Tea and some cookies on the table.”

In fact, they were some cookie-ish mystery treats to go with the tea. But, knowing that the tea was Echidna’s bodily fluids, the cookies might very well be made of Echidna’s body cells or something.

Since he couldn’t gulp it all down at once like the tea, Subaru made a point of not touching it. But, hearing that there was food, the reaction “COOKIES!?” from Daphne was pretty clear,

Daphne: “Th—th—th—that would do. That would doo, Daphne, put it in Daphne’s mouth please. Hurry, aaaaa, hurry...”

Subaru: “If we take it out of context that request can be totally misunderstood so can you please be more careful with that!? But well... I guess I’m not enough of a sadist to keep someone who wants it so badly waiting.”

Subaru picked up the plate of sweets and approached Daphne’s coffin, intending to place the cookies in her mouth. But, before he could do so,

Daphne: “Ah, but but, wait Subaruun, can you wait a momeeeent?”

Subaru: “Hm? What. Just so you know, we only got one flavor here. There’s no chocolate in there so it’s probably just plain flavored. If you tell me you don’t like it, I won’t force you to eat it all up and not leave anything behind or anything like that.”

Daphne: “That’s not it... It’s just, I don’t want Subaruun to come too close when you feed Daphne.”

Subaru: “That’s a pretty difficult request when you’re asking me to feed you, isn’t it!?”

His approach having been rejected, Subaru stood there holding the plate of cookies, at a loss about what to do.

All the while, the girl in the coffin slightly pushed herself up,

Daphne: “Please don’t misunderstand though... It’s not because I hate you or feel biologically repulsed by you or just can’t stand you at all or anything like that you know...”

Subaru: “Those reassurances totally just made you sound less credible! Reason! Tell me a reason!”

Daphne: “Subaruun’s smell, if you get too close to Daphne, it’ll be like pooison.”

Subaru: “My body odor’s like poison!?”

Hearing that even more hurtful comment, Subaru quickly raised up his arm to smell himself. But there was nothing particularly striking, although, humans are usually slow to notice their own odors.

Subaru looked himself up and down, but,

Subaru: "I smell? I really smell? I took a proper bath after coming to the Sanctuary, though? I didn't have soap like back at the mansion, but considering I'll be around Emilia, I did ensure the minimal level of personal hygiene... No, I mean, this is the spirit world isn't it? Would the harsh surface conditions really carry over in here?"

Daphne: "Noooo, iiiiit's nooot liiike thaaat. Uuum, shouldn't, you understand, Subaruun?"

Subaru: "Not at all! That just sounds like it's all my fault here! How am I supposed to just understand? Tch!"

While Subaru was flailing his arms around shouting this, Daphne shook her head left and right, slightly rocking her coffin. With the sound of creaking wood, "How should I say this..." she continued at her own unique tempo,

Daphne: "If I smell Subaruun's smell, Daphne will want to eat Subaruun more than the cookie, and that'll make Daphne feel all troubled you know..."

Subaru: "...Eh? Sorry, I didn't quite understand that."

Daphne: "Compared to vegetables, Daphne likes meat more, and hard meat is better than soft meat, that kind of thing, you know..."

Suddenly, Subaru felt a chill shooting up the back of his spine.

Holding his breath as he stared at Daphne, there had been no change in her appearance since the beginning. Still bound inside her coffin, her bondage prevented any movement from her body, and her eyes, still sealed behind her blindfolds, never once looked upon Subaru.

If those restraints were not for fashion, then what were they for—

Daphne: "From what I can smell, Subaruun's meat is so muscled and sinewy, and the bones are thick too, must be really... just what Daphne likes. So, if you get too close, you'll smell so nice that I'll want to eat you."

Subaru: "E-eat me... in the sexy sense?"

Daphne: "In the eating-raw sense..."

Hearing the slightly different interpretation, Subaru gulped down a breath.

Then, quickly putting some distance between himself and the girl, Subaru grabbed a cookie from the plate once he made sure that he was at a safe enough distance.

Subaru: “I-I’ll try to throw it to you from here, but sorry if I miss your mouth, ok?”

Daphne: “That’s okay, Subaruun. Just try to toss it so it hits the coffin. Then I can pick it up myself.”

Subaru: “That sounds incredibly disconcerting, but uh... alright, here goes!”

With a small swing of his arm, Subaru lightly tossed the cookie toward Daphne’s mouth.

A cookie the size of a five-hundred-yen coin traced out a surprisingly perfect trajectory, and flew neatly into Daphne’s mouth. This unprecedented degree of control was just the result of Subaru’s extreme concentration.

With the precision of threading a needle, he had managed to shoot it right into Daphne’s mouth. Catching it on her tongue, Daphne ate it up in an instant,

Daphne: “Omnyuomnyu... nnnnn, soooo tastyyyy. Dona-Dona’s flavor...”

Subaru: “I don’t know if that means she made it herself or if she used dark magic to infuse some of her own body parts into the cookies... I’m throwing the next one!”

Daphne: “Oooo, I can’t wait. Ooommn... hey, gimme more...”

Subaru: “That’s gonna throw off my aim can you please keep quiet!?”

Trying to shut down Daphne’s erotically provocative encouragements, Subaru continued throwing cookie after cookie. It was an almost infuriating scene of two people playing with food, but then, seeing the serious look on Subaru’s face, one might feel discouraged from reproaching him.

Although Daphne had to occasionally move her head, the cookies landed in her mouth in the end. And, just as Subaru was starting to feel relieved that they could clear all the cookies on the plate this way,

Subaru: “—Ah.”

A strong wind swept across the small hill, blowing the nimbly tossed out cookie off-course. Flying far out of the way of its target, it headed over the table and for the side of the hill. Falling like this, it might as well be food for the ants— Or so Subaru thought, when,

Daphne: “Noooooooo... such a waaaste.”

With her extraordinary sense of smell, Daphne realized that the cookie was flying away. She followed the cookie’s demise with her sightless vision, and, in the next moment, Subaru saw it.

Subaru: “———!?”

A violent sound rang out, as a sharp claw gouged destruction into the earth.

Rolling up a cloud of soil and dust, the assault of the unceasing sound expanded as it reached the falling cookie,

Daphne: “Aa, mwu.”

Daphne stuck out her neck, caught the cookie between her red lips and happily slipped it into her mouth. After chewing with an almost indiscernible noise, she licked her lips and let out a sensual “Ohhh.”,

Having witnessed the whole thing, Subaru fell speechless. Noticing Subaru’s silence, Daphne gave a little sniff,

Daphne: “Subaruun... isn’t there, still two left? Don’t be mean...”

The girl with flushed cheeks and quivering lips, like a baby bird waiting to be fed, was definitely adorable. If one could overlook the blindfolded eyes and the full body restraints binding her inside the black coffin—

Subaru: “...No, there’s definitely no way to be unfazed by this.”

And the crab-like legs that emerged from the sides of the coffin, carrying its host in this bizarrely unconventional sight.

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Subaru: "So uh... Mind if I ask what that is?"

Still not recovered from the initial shock, Subaru threw the two remaining cookies to Daphne as requested. Both of which also missed due to his trembling fingertips, but, with the deft footwork of her coffin, Daphne easily caught them in her mouth.

Looking like she was enjoying their sweetness to her heart's content, Daphne let out a "Uuunnn." as Subaru somehow squeezed out his question.

Daphne: "What that is... even if you ask Daphne, Daphne couldn't see so Daphne wouldn't know..."

Subaru: "I mean the uh... super shiny awesome-looking mobile coffin you got there. In my narrow, shallow knowledge, coffins usually don't come with legs and don't make high-speed insect-like movements like that."

Gichi gichi sounded the coffin, and it slowly clambered back to its original position with Daphne in tow. The base of the coffin plunked onto the grass with a thud, and the crab-like legs withdrew into the sides once more. The movement was not unlike a turtle pulling its legs into its shell.

As if picking up Subaru's sentiment, Daphne laughed "Aahaa",

Daphne: "You mean Centipede Coffiin? It's because Daphne can't move freelyy, so I made this child to make up for it... He's usually a good, quiet child you know?"

Subaru: "Made it... It's a, living creature...?"

Even though it was making organic-looking movements with organic-looking organs, Subaru wasn't so sure if he could group that thing with living organisms. Though of course, it was definitely not mechanical.

Daphne: "It doesn't need to eat... or drink... but Centipede Coffin stays alive by absorbing Mana, you know? So it won't feel hungry... which makes me kinda jealous."

Subaru: "It eats Mana... Nevermind, we can leave that for another time. More importantly, you said you made it? You can, make living things?"

Daphne: “Instead of living things... It’s more like Witchbeasts... Daphne takes some intentions and feelings and stuff and whooshwhoosh it around, and a creature comes out.”

Daphne squirmed around a bit inside the coffin. None of the words that came out of her mouth gave any concrete idea of what that actually entailed, but, even from that vague explanation, Subaru got the sense that she was capable of something outrageous.

—To create living things, is surely the work of Gods.

While, in his original world, there was genetic engineering and forbidden sciences like cloning, to create new life out of nothing was certainly something only Gods could accomplish.

But, whether that should be considered blasphemy against life or attainment of inconceivable powers would depend on who you ask.

Subaru: “Unless... «Daphne’s inauspicious legacy»... and creating the Witchbeasts, meant exactly what it sounded like?”

Daphne: “Hmhm?”

Subaru: “White Whale, Black Serpent, Great Rabbit... Are all of them like that crab coffin of yours? Just things you created...?”

Daphne: “Mnnnmhuuu... Uuunn, such nostalgic names... Yeah. The Whaaale, Snaaake, Raaabbit, they’re all children Daphne made.”

Subaru: “Why!?”

Baring his teeth as he heard her words of affirmation, Subaru closed the distance between them, shouting, sending spit flying.

His face red with anger, he thrust his finger towards Daphne,

Subaru: “Why the hell would you create monsters like that? Do you realize, for the four-hundred years after you died, what kind of havoc they’ve been wreaking in the world outside!? How many tens of hundreds of people at a time fell victim to their...!”

The fierce battle on Lifaus Highway resurfaced in his mind.

Wilhelm's obsession and screams for the memories of his murdered wife, and the cries of rage from the lines of knights— were because of the tragedies brought about by the White Whale and by the Witch who birthed him.

As for the Great Rabbit that attacked the Sanctuary, if Subaru's subsequent efforts fail to bear fruit, then Emilia, alongside everyone else in the Sanctuary, would be devoured.

If the harbinger of natural disasters that is the Great Rabbit was also a consequence of the Witch before his eyes, then,

Subaru: "Why did you do it!? Tell me! Why did you create monsters that are the cause of so many people's suffering!!?"

Daphne: "...? But, bigger animals means more food to eat, riight?"

Subaru: "—Ah, uh, huh?"

Daphne replied to Subaru's impassioned words, looking confused.

Thrown into an unexpected train of thought by her answer, Subaru groaned stupidly before his tongue could catch up.

Seeing him like this, a mystified expression came onto Daphne's face,

Daphne: "The White Whale, it's huuge, right? If we eat that child, don't you think lots and lots of people's stomachs would be filled?"

Subaru: "What... 're you..."

Daphne: "Great Rabbit too, it'll keep on multiplying all the time. Soo, as long as we have that child, we can just leave it to become more and more and no one will never have to worry about food, right?"

Subaru: "Multi... ply?"

Though he was hearing Daphne's words, his mind couldn't understand them at all.

If those shocking words really meant exactly what they sounded like, then Subaru would have absolutely no idea what this Witch in front of him was talking about. Honestly, from the bottom of his heart, he had no idea what she meant—

Subaru: “Wha—what? You created the Witchbeasts... to solve the food problems? The White Whale and the Great Rabbit were supposed to feed people stricken by hunger? Even though, thanks to your thoughtfulness, all those people were eaten instead!?”

Daphne: “...? But, if you want to eat the other without considering the possibility of being eaten yourself, don’t you think that’d be super selfish?”

Subaru: “...”

Daphne: “Besiiides, don’t you think there are already too many humans and demi-humans for this world? If those children can lower the number a bit and put things right again, Daphne thinks that’d be pretty good tooo.”

Subaru: “Th—then why does the White Whale spit fog that erases people’s existences, and the Great Rabbit eat up whole villages to its heart’s content...?”

Daphne: “I don’t know much about how they hunt... How they grew up, how much they eat, where they eat... Even if I knew, it still wouldn’t fill Daphne’s hungry belly...”

Seeing Daphne’s smile as she said this, Subaru finally understood.

The meaning of Echidna’s words, he finally understood it.

She had warned him that his affinity with Daphne was the worst it could get.

At first, Subaru thought it was referring to her off-beat tempo that clashed his impatience and had so optimistically thought that it was merely a mismatch of personality.

—But the mismatch between Subaru and Daphne was in their very systems of values.

Rather, it was not only with Subaru. Her value system probably wouldn’t align with any human being at all. Her perspective was of a completely different dimension than that of humans and demi-humans. And it was not just because she was biased towards the Witchbeasts she herself had created.

The strong makes food of the weak— this was the only principle within her considerations. To acknowledge the existence of food, to increase its volume, and to consume it. All else was trivial.

He had nothing to say to that. The very structure of their minds was fundamentally different.

Of all the Witches Subaru encountered up to now, in spite of their quirks and misunderstandings, he felt that he was nonetheless able to hold conversations with them.

But, in the end, all these girls were Witches. They were Witches. The only seven in this world, Witches in the truest sense of the word.

Daphne: “Subaruun too... Everyone thinks way too little of Gluttony, don’t they?”

Subaru: “...”

Daphne: “In the first place, as long as you’re alive, isn’t the desire to eat the most important desire there is? After all, if you don’t satisfy it, you can’t go on living...”

Subaru: “...”

Daphne: “Even if you have no peace, no one to love you, no one you could tell your feelings to, no way to maintain your sense of self, or obtain the things you wanted, or even if you have nothing at all to aspire to... None of these would kill you, would they? But...”

Subaru: “...”

Daphne: “If you don’t eat, you’ll die, you know?”

Of the Seven Deadly Sins, only Gluttony is directly related to life and death.

In the proper sense, Gluttony should be the desire to eat beyond what is necessary. But what Daphne was referring to was desiring to eat in order to survive.

In that regard, Subaru couldn’t deny it. What she said was true, one of the truths of life itself. But it would be a mistake to disregard all else in favor of that alone.

Subaru: “Part of what you said is right... but that kind of thinking...”

Daphne: “Then why don’t Subaruun try it... what it feels like to be starved to your limits? Once you do... I’m sure you’ll understand what Daphne’s saying.”

That was just something a Witch would suggest.

Slowly, Daphne raised her body inside the coffin. With the sound of ripping paper, Daphne easily released the intersecting chains. Pushing aside the loose white bondage with her arm, Daphne hopped out of the coffin and landed barefoot onto the grass.

The tiny figure gave her arms and legs a shake, checking over her stiffened body,

Daphne: “I hate being on my own feet... Belly feels so empty when I do... really does... you know...”

Doing this little warm up, Daphne was already out of breath.

But, facing her, Subaru couldn’t move an inch. Even his breathing was sealed. The immense pressure emanating from this little Witch’s body held Subaru firmly within its grasp. It was as if his whole body was being gripped by a gigantic palm.

Daphne: “It would be nice if I could just eat Subaruun like this, but Dona-Dona and Met-Met would get angry... Uuuuummm, just the left eye should be alright.”

Saying this, Daphne placed a hand on the blindfolds over her eyes.

“Don’t release her bondage, don’t touch her body, and don’t make eye contact”— all of these, Echidna had warned him of before she summoned Daphne.

But Daphne herself had unfastened her restraints, and though he hadn’t touched her, his body was immobilized by her pressure. And, as for the last warning,

Subaru: “———”

Her left eye was golden. Nothing out of the ordinary, only the round pupil of a little girl.

Lifting the blindfold over her left eye, Daphne stared at Subaru.

As if being penetrated by her golden pupil, Subaru remained frozen still. And then, she blinked a few times,

Daphne: "That... should be enough..."

Saying this, with the same beleaguered movements, she made her way back to her coffin. And, just as she looked like she was about to collapse, the mobile coffin gently caught her inside.

Stirring her body around, Daphne found the most comfortable position. All the while, immobilized on the spot, Subaru quietly chewed something in his mouth as he watched her,

Daphne yawned and placed the blindfold back over her eyes. The fabric in the interior of the coffin slowly peeled open and wrapped her tiny body snugly inside, binding her in its grasp.

Like it wasn't even there, her restraints operated entirely on her will.

Subaru: "What just happened... Also, why... do you..."

Daphne: "You still haven't noticed it yet...?"

Just as Subaru was about to ask her why she would restrain herself, Daphne interrupted his question, while giving her body a wriggle inside the coffin as if to make sure the restraints were properly fastened.

The moment her words entered his ears, Subaru furrowed his brows as though he noticed something.

Subaru: "Ah, ugh...?"

Pain. It was pain.

Rising in Subaru's waist was a pain that gave the illusion that a hole had been opened there, forcing his body to bend.

His guts wrenched as sensations of thirst and hunger protested with overwhelming starvation. Groaning, writhing in the unbearable pain, Subaru's knees collapsed onto the grass.

Saliva drooled from the edge of his lips as he desperately tried to endure the pain. Hunger, hunger, hunger hunger hunger hunger hunger hunger hunger hunger hunger hunger hunger hunger hunger

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Subaru: “Aa, aaa, AAAAAaaahh... hur...ts...”

The intense hunger sent his consciousness scattering and his thoughts into disarray as he lost all sense of reality.

Panting, writhing, he rolled back and forth on the ground. His movements only exacerbating the hunger, Subaru wriggled, convulsing like a caterpillar on the bed of grass.

Starvation, maddening starvation. Famishing. Life-threatening. A gaping hole, there’s a gaping hole in his stomach. Dying, he’s going to die, he’s going to die if he doesn’t eat. He’s going to die. He’s going to die.

Daphne: “You still haven’t noticed it yet...?”

Looking down on the writhing, suffocating Subaru— although her eyes did not actually see him, Daphne kept a grasp of Subaru’s condition through sound and smell.

He couldn’t understand the meaning of her words. Notice what, notice what when the hunger was driving him insane? Although he understood that she was behind this, there was no room for resentment in the face of this hunger. He wouldn’t be able to bear it if he didn’t fill this hunger. Right now, the only cog holding together his sanity was the thing he had been chewing on since—

Subaru: “———”

What, was Subaru, eating, right now?

Daphne: “You noticed it? That’s gluttony, you know.”

Hearing Daphne’s words, Subaru noticed it— the pinky and ring fingers on his right hand were missing.

Where did the missing fingers go? There was no need to look. He was chewing on the fragments of his pinky finger right this moment.

Profuse blood seeped from the torn-off stumps, dyeing the green grass field with red.

Watching the droplets fall, Subaru's mind went blank. With the passing of the seconds, something slowly came to fill that blankness. An emotion, of—

—Ahh, spilling blood is such a waste.

Simply a desire to quench his thirsting throat, and the disappointment of his unsated hunger.

Arc 4 Chapter 48 - Price for the Tea Party

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 11, Chapter 5 “The Witches’ Tea Party”, Parts 6 (later half)-7, and Volume 11, Chapter 6 “Loveloveloveloveloveloveyou”, Part 1

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken – [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#), [Part 4](#)

He heard a roar.

Compelled by hunger to extend his tongue to catch the blood dripping from his right hand, Subaru heard the roar in the distance. Rage, it was full of rage. Furious. Someone was enraged. Someone was furious. A voice of someone enraged to the point of madness.

—It didn’t matter. For now, he just wanted to sate his hunger.

Chew, chew, chew, but it wasn’t enough.

What was two fingers supposed to sate? And how much of this thirst could some dripping blood quench?

Not enough. Not enough. Not nearly enough.

Even if he devoured his entire right hand, then devoured his left hand as well, even if he devoured his whole body, it still wouldn’t be enough. There was no limit to this hunger. He simply craved what he craved. And so—

???: “—Hnnnnngyaaaaaa!!”

Subaru: “———What the f—!?”

Laying sideways on the grass, the devastating strike came from directly above his head, sending his body bouncing up from the shockwave before slamming back into the ground. The sheer force warped the earth, leaving a crater in the small hill with Subaru in the center.

Then, the assailant, whose fist was still stuck to the back of Subaru's head, took a ragged breath, and,

???: "That's enough! Why does everyone always have to fight...? Resorting to violence is the worst... the worst... Ugh."

The voice, half in tears, descended from above, while, savoring the taste of mud, consciousness limped back into Subaru. At the same time, he felt a drop of water landing on the back of his head, guiding him to look up.

There was the vague outline of a young, blonde girl, slowly disappearing, and in tears.

—What just happened to him? Pushing himself off the ground, Subaru understood when he noticed that his right hand had been restored. Quickly, he turned to the disappearing girl,

Subaru: "Th-thank you for healing me...!"

Minerva: "...Hmph."

The Witch turned her face away, sulking as she faded.

But, just before she vanished completely, Subaru caught a glimpse of a blush on her cheeks, and a smile which she didn't manage to hide.

Once the blonde girl—the Witch of Wrath vanished from the scene, she was replaced by the graceless coffin once again,

Daphne: "Neru-Neru's such a meddler, geez... Say, did you learn anything at least? Diid you? Subaruuuun?"

Hearing these nonchalant words coming from inside the coffin, Subaru jumped to his feet and instantly scuttled away from the crater while shooting Daphne a look of caution.

Seeing this, Daphne gave her nose a snort,

Daphne: "Riiight right, you should be careful... After all, eat or be eaten is the only relationship in this world..."

Subaru: “I don’t wanna think of it as that kind of bloodthirsty place...! Anyway what just happened!? It was only for a short while, but... I actually went insane.”

Daphne: “That was maddening hunger... Extreme hunger can turn people into something worse than beasts. If you looked into my right eye too, it would’ve been even more interesting, you know?”

Subaru: “...You’re kidding.”

A magical eye, or something of the sort.

Although Ram’s clairvoyance would also count as an eye-power, her ability didn’t really have much offensive potential, so Daphne’s was definitely way scarier.

Perhaps it could be called the Eye of Hunger or the Eye of Starvation. The moment Subaru looked into her left eye, he ate his own fingers for a hunger he wasn’t even aware of.

He was so famished that he forgot the existence of pain, and everything in sight was food to sate his insatiable hunger. In other words—

Subaru: “Is that... how the Great Rabbit sees the world...?”

Daphne: “Those children were born when Daphne was reeeaaaaally starving, so they took after me... they really understand what it feels like to want to eat each other, you know?”

Subaru: “How can you say that so lightly... Don’t you feel sad to have given birth to creatures like that? Since you’re lecturing me all high and mighty, then you probably know what that hunger feels like. Having your own children... children... go through that...”

Daphne: “—? But, even if Great Rabbit’s belly goes hungry, it doesn’t mean Daphne’s belly to be hungry too?”

Subaru: “...I was an idiot for asking.”

Like parallel lines. No matter how far they stretch, there was no way he could ever understand this Witch.

The Witchbeasts she claimed to be her children, were really just emergency food she could pick up and eat when she felt hungry.

Birthered from her own body and eaten by herself, it was the ultimate form of self-sufficiency.

Subaru: “If you don’t bother anyone and go hole up in some other dimension to be self-sufficient there, I guess no one would be too hung up about that, huh.”

Daphne: “Say, Subaruun, what is it that you actually want to ask Daphne? If all you want to do is take hits at Daphne, then I’m already getting hungry from staying awake so long... and would rather take a nap now...”

Turning her face away inside the coffin, all the strength drained from Daphne’s body, as if ready to fall asleep.

He finally understood why she kept herself in her mobile coffin, all bound in restraints. Keeping her threat contained for the sake of the outside world— was not the reason.

Instead, it was only to reduce the calories burned from the movements of her limbs so she wouldn’t feel as hungry. This may not be the case for her blindfolds, but that was probably to prevent her magic eyes from draining her stamina.

This girl’s existence was complete entirely in herself.

A pure mass of desire to eat— All quite fitting for the name, Witch of Gluttony.

Subaru: “Honestly, I’m pretty sure it’s pointless to ask this, but... how do I destroy the Great Rabbit?”

Daphne: “Eeeeehhh? You want to destroy the Great Rabbit? But that child’s so weak and easy to eat, and keeps on multiplying too. He’s one of Daphne’s greatest masterpieces, you know?”

Subaru: “Eat or be eaten... If you go by that kind of philosophy, then what about killing your enemies to stay alive? I was hoping you’d approve of a survival instinct besides appetite.”

Subaru decided to strike from the same baseline as Daphne’s own warped morality.

Honestly, he had already half-given up on getting any information out of Daphne. After all, he couldn't seem to get her to say anything useful, and couldn't even see himself establishing a proper conversation with her.

At first glance, their game of conversational catch-ball may seem to be going smoothly, but the reality was that she was chewing up every ball Subaru was throwing, begging him to throw more, without ever tossing back anything of her own. However,

Daphne: "Since I eat in order to live, I also have to permit killing in order to live... Uuuuunn, that's, nnn, that's also right, isn't it."

Subaru: "—Eh? That worked?"

Daphne: "If Daphne thinks something is right, then Daphne will accept it. Subaruun too, what did you take Daphne for?"

"This is the witchiest Witch I've ever seen", Subaru sincerely thought. But if he used that as his answer, there'd be no end to it, so he decided to keep it to himself.

Oblivious to that silence, Daphne pouted her lips with "Huuuuuuu",

Daphne: "If you want to destroy Great Rabbit-chan, Met-Met, Dona-Dona, and Milla-Milla can all do it easily."

Subaru: "Wait, whose nickname was that you just called? Dona-Dona... is Echidna, right? Met-Met... must be Sekhmet. But who's Milla-Milla?"

Daphne: "Carmilla... she's Lust. But she doesn't seem to want to meet you, Subaruun."

Subaru: "Even though it's somewhat depressing to hear that the one in charge of sexy things hates me... your suggestion is not gonna work. The Witches can't leave this place, so you guys can't help me."

Daphne: "...Huuuuu, can't do it huh...?"

For Subaru, who's used to relying on others, such an offer would have been more than he could have hoped for. If they could go out and help him, they would be more than enough to deal with the Great Rabbit and Elsa, but,

Subaru: “Even if you could go outside... Would you be satisfied with just destroying and eating the Great Rabbit and coming back here?”

Daphne: “Daphne’s stomach has never been satisfied in my entire life, you know...”

Subaru: “So, even if there’s a way to get you guys outside, I can’t let you guys go.”

Sticking out his tongue at Daphne’s unsurprising reply, Subaru ruled out her proposal. Inside the coffin, Daphne made an “Uunnnn”, and,

Daphne: “If that won’t work, then you’ll just have to do your best to eat all of them to the last one, I think. Those kids won’t be able to multiply from zero... Haaaha...”

Subaru: “Nevermind eating... So we have to kill all of them, huh... And if we leave just one alive, the whole thing will revive... They move in a group, right? But are they always all together?”

Daphne: “Yeah... Even though there are many of them, their consciousness is singular. Like, one consciousness, shared by the whole group. They don’t really have the intelligence to split up.”

Subaru: “Is that... so. In that case, we shouldn’t run into a problem where we leave some stragglers alive to multiply... and then find out there’s a punchline of *kyoufushin to ifu*¹²⁵ or whatever, right?”

It happens quite alot in horror movies where after exterminating the bloody monsters, you find out that some of them survived underground to reproduce and you wind up with a “The predicament is not over!” ending.

But, at least, it seems the Rabbits aren’t smart enough to pull a stunt like that.

Subaru: “Oh by the way... About how many rabbits are there on average? If they eat each other, then I’m thinking they must have some system for keeping their numbers in range, or...”

Daphne: “...Who knows? Would you be able to count the numbers of droplets in a fog, Subaruun...?”

¹²⁵ English flip. Means “fear and dread” (恐怖心と畏怖), originally “パニックホラ” (panic and horror).

Subaru: “It’s that level...? No no, I already know I can’t take your word for it. So I’ll just go see for myself.”

Just counting the number of rabbits that swarmed him, there must have been more than a hundred. But, considering how they devoured everyone in the Sanctuary, their number must be closer to the tens of thousands.

In order to kill them all, he’d have to think of a better way.

While Subaru sank into thought, Daphne gave a big yawn to indicate her boredom. And then, making quiet chewing motions in front of the silent Subaru,

Daphne: “Subaruun... if you’re busy pondering, could Daphne disappear now? After all, I get hungrier when I exist...”

Subaru: “Preferring not to exist just so you could be less hungry is seriously a mind-blowing statement... But yeah, regardless of how we got here, that was a lot of help. Thanks. —Also.”

Throwing out those half-assed words of thanks, Subaru appended an “Also” at the end.

Seeing Daphne cast him a puzzled expression, he went on with the most scornful voice he could muster,

Subaru: “I’ll annihilate that asshole Rabbit. And I’ve already killed your White Whale. I hope you don’t mind, Mommy-sama.”

Daphne: “...”

Subaru: “Four-hundred years, that’s how long those bastards born from your good intentions preyed on the world outside. That’s long enough— It’s time I erase them without leaving a trace.”

Daphne: “You are merely a human.”

In front of Subaru’s declaration of war, Daphne made a reaction which he had never seen before.

Stretching her lips wide, for the first time, her expression revealed something other than hunger.

Daphne: “Try it if you can.”

With her red tongue extended from a mouth lined with razor-sharp fangs, the Witch of Gluttony smiled.

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A great gust of wind swept up, forcing Subaru to lift his arm to cover his eyes.

The abrupt wind made waves in the grass fields at his feet, sending green blades swirling and scattering into the air. Inadvertently following it with his gaze and letting his eyes be drawn up into the sky, when he looked back again,

Subaru: "Sorry for putting you through the trouble, Echidna."

Echidna: "I just knew it would turn out like that... That's why I tried to stop you."

Subaru: "It's not like it can be helped... She kinda released her bondage and flipped up her blindfold herself. You should actually praise me a bit for not touching her, you know."

Echidna: "Right. If you did touch Daphne, it wouldn't have ended so easily. Her left eye alone is not as much of a threat. But the horror of Daphne lies in her right eye, and it only truly begins once you've been eaten."

Subaru couldn't help but recoil a bit at that terrifying statement.

Frankly, the part about "not being as much of a threat" was already enough to set off some alarms.

Subaru: "...What's the point of showing me my opponent's *geiiki*¹²⁶ after the battle's already over? Geez. Although, I might want to hear it out in case I run into another monster with a similar setup..."

Echidna: "Monster, you say?"

Still not quite able to shake off his negative impression of Daphne, Subaru realized he might have misspoken when he heard Echidna's disappointed mutter.

¹²⁶ English flip. Means "(range of) skills" (芸域), originally "ステータス" (status).

To her, Daphne was someone she could call her friend. Although one must admit that only a Witch could be friends with someone like that, this was this and that was that. No matter how you look at it, to call a Witch a monster in front of another Witch was,

Subaru: “Ahh, I wasn’t thinking just now. Sorry. Got carried away. I have absolutely no comment about that friend of yours. That’s all I have to say.”

Echidna: “Huhuhu, there’s no need to be so considerate for a Witch’s feelings. We are quite used to those words of ostracism.”

Subaru: “...I can’t be so sure about what words to use for Daphne, but I don’t think you’re a monster. That much I should clarify, you know.”

Hearing this, Echidna’s eyes widened in surprise.

And, seeing her reaction, Subaru quickly looked away, chiding himself for his self-serving thoughts. What he said just now was clearly to get on her good side. Of course, half of it was sincere, but that didn’t change the fact that he was trying to avoid making a bad impression on the helpful Witch.

Then again, considerations of this caliber must surely have been seen through by this seasoned Witch.

Echidna: “No, it won’t work! Even if you try to dupe me with those pleasing words, I won’t let myself be duped! Want some more tea or cookies?”

Subaru: “Saying that while looking so cheerful isn’t convincing at all! What’s with your route being so easy? This is like desperate-lonely-girl-level!”

If she fell for such obvious flattery, then he’d have some serious worries about her future.

Although he already knows this isn’t what it is— Subaru’s chest gives a throb.

Subaru: “I think I’ll pass on the body fluids and the who-knows-what’s-in-there cookies.”

Echidna: “I didn’t put my hair or anything in them?”

Subaru: “How can I not doubt every statement you make at this point!”

Subaru had already decided that he would never eat anything from here again.

Seeing Subaru shoot her a suspicious look, Echidna gave a wry smile. Then, she returned his gaze with her all-seeing eyes. Sometimes, for some reason, he just found those eyes really disconcerting.

Subaru: "I don't like that look that feels like it can see right through me."

Echidna: "If I could see through all of you just by looking, then I wouldn't mind staring at you until you are burned to a char... But anyway, are you aware of it, or not, I wonder?"

Subaru: "Aware or not of what?"

Echidna: "Well, in my narrow, clumsy imagination, what you went through just now should be considered a rather shocking experience to most humans. Surely, being compelled by hunger into eating your own body isn't your everyday happening?"

Listening to Echidna's understated delivery, Subaru was reminded of just how hideous his situation had been. Holding up his right hand, he confirmed that all five fingers were still there, all thanks to a certain Witch's hit-and-run healing.

While Subaru quietly thanked her in his mind, Echidna closed one of her eyes,

Echidna: "Minerva just ignored my calls and jumped out. When she catches sight of a wound, she'll charge out regardless of appearances... It's hard to live a long life with a personality like that. In fact, she was the first of us to be killed."

Subaru: "The end of the Witches, huh. I heard you were all eaten by the Witch of Envy, but is it alright for me to ask about that?"

Echidna: "To ask the dead about how they died, is that too crude a thing to do, I wonder? It is certainly unprecedented. And as for how I feel about it... Hmm, let me see. I don't think I should relay that story. It involves the other five's reputations, after all."

Seeing Echidna unwilling to discuss the details of their deaths, Subaru could only accept that it can't be helped.

Subaru himself had died many times before, and knew full well that it was not a topic for lighthearted conversation. After all, death is an awfully heavy thing.

Subaru: “In that sense, I guess you guys are some of the few people who could share that feeling with me.”

Echidna: “...No, I wouldn’t be so sure. Indeed, we have died once, but I don’t know if we could think of it the same way you do.”

Just when he thought he had found some common ground, Subaru’s words were rejected.

But just as he was about to object to Echidna’s curtness, all of that emotion evaporated when he noticed the grave expression on her face. She was looking directly at him, her brows furrowed with a tinge of sadness,

Echidna: “This is also related to something related to your awareness... Have you noticed that your current state is crooked?”

Subaru: “Crooked...?”

Echidna: “It is no doubt a consequence of the special circumstances of Return by Death. And so, while it pains me to recognize that as the reason, it pains me even more to see that you yourself are not aware of it.”

Subaru: “I’m not sure I understand... So, what’re you trying to tell...”

Echidna: “Do you think it’s normal for someone who just ate their own fingers, even if they are healed, to carry on a casual conversation as though nothing had happened?”

Subaru: “———”

For a moment, Subaru stopped breathing.

With steady eyes, Echidna watched the frozen Subaru. And then, to that Subaru who had forgotten how to breathe,

Echidna: “You weren’t entirely unaware, it seems.”

Subaru: "...It's a matter of how I look at it, I guess. Honestly, I'm aware that the way I'm thinking right now isn't normal. But for the sake of what's most important to me... I feel it's alright to cut off the rest of it."

Echidna: "The rest of it, such as?"

Subaru: "Well, my primary goal right now is to break through this deadlock. The problems at the mansion, the problems at the Sanctuary, and most of all, the problems facing Emilia. I'm still as stuck as ever, and still have no idea where to begin, but..."

Breathing in through his nose, Subaru looked up to the sky.

Blue and vast, with white, drifting clouds, and a somehow soothing breeze. Letting it all soak into his sight, immersed in this scenery detached from the tedium of reality,

Subaru: "I've already decided that I'll use the hell out of everything I can get my hands on."

Echidna: "...So you've accepted Return by Death, then?"

Subaru: "It's not that I've accepted it... Only, I'm a bit short on tools to begin with, so it's just about all I have... Don't misunderstand though, I really don't like using it at all."

In front of Echidna, who must have already picked up on his thoughts, Subaru nonetheless tacked on this unnecessary clarification.

Subaru: "In order to reach that desired future, even if I have to pay with my life, I will do it. For now, I've at least been assured that I can keep Returning by Death for as long as I can keep my sanity. In that case, I'll just have to muster as much backbone as this boneless self can muster."

Echidna: "To pile on these deaths, in order to bring it within your reach— That is not a resolve any ordinary person would be capable of."

Subaru: "I've died too many times, I guess... Before I knew it, my head must've gotten messed up."

He wasn't making light of death. It was just that the accumulation of the experiences of death in Subaru had strengthened his conviction into something irreversible, and terrifying. Without a doubt, Subaru now feared death more than ever before.

But, in spite of this, Subaru nonetheless intended to make full use of death. It was as simple as that.

After piling on his deaths, and having witnessed the ends of worlds, what he found far more unbearable than his own death, were the deaths of the people close to him. If it meant saving them from the inescapable fate of death, then he would expend as many of his replaceable lives as necessary.

Swallow down all the pain, agony, and horror, and die in order to survive.

—That, was the basis of Natsuki Subaru’s so-called crooked resolve.

Subaru: “If the only thing I have to sacrifice is my own heartbreaks, then I will gladly do it. Return by Death is just the perfect ability for this powerless brainless always-relying-on-others self, isn’t it?”

Echidna: “...”

Subaru: “I was hoping you’d console me with «Don’t think so little of yourself!» or something!?”

Echidna: “Considering the obstacles that await you in every direction, I can’t say it so lightly. In fact, if you wish to take control of this current situation, there is no way not to use it. Although personally, I would be quite displeased to have no choice but to rely on Envy.”

The fact that Echidna refrained from offering easy consolations just meant that she was the type to be mindful of the circumstances.

Although it wasn’t much for encouragement, he was still grateful for having someone to kick him awake like this. After all, knowing that the road ahead will leave him full of wounds and scratches only made it all the more worth taking.

Subaru: “In the end, all I can do is spam Return by Death and keep going over my options, huh. I’d hate to imagine how many painful experiences I’m gonna be facing up ahead.”

Echidna: “...”

Subaru: “One of the mysteries I gotta solve though, is what kind of experiments were you running in this Experimental Grounds of the Sanctuary... You probably don’t feel like telling me, do you?”

Echidna: “...No, I don’t. I already told you before. I wouldn’t want you to despise me.”

Echidna shook her head at Subaru's question, and denied his request.

Receiving this reply, "I have no choice, then", Subaru went on with a click of his neck,

Subaru: "If you won't tell me, then there's no other choice. I'll just have to go ahead and rip open all the secrets you wanted to hide. You won't try to stop me, will you?"

Echidna: "...If you want to rip it open, there's nothing I can do. If you want to overpower my secrets you despise so much and forcibly expose them under the sun, then my only choice is to silently endure it."

Subaru: "You're making it sound like I'm planning to do something awful can you not please say it like that!?"

Echidna's cheeks blushed and quickly looked away from Subaru.

He seriously wasn't sure if she was doing that on purpose or if that just happened to be her personality. Just from what he had seen over the course of the tea party, she really might actually be that airheaded... Witches are scary.

Then, just when he was about to resume the conversation,

Subaru: "Nnh—"

Suddenly, still seated in his chair, a dizziness struck him. Something resembling the dazzled feeling from standing up too fast continued to sway Subaru's consciousness. That is,

Echidna: "It seems your body is close to waking up."

Subaru: "The tea party is coming to an end, huh... It's been pretty worthwhile, I guess."

Echidna: "Well, that's because you surprised me last time, telling me there was nothing you wanted to ask. This time, I wonder if I've lived up to my reputation as the Witch of Greed?"

With all the discussing, teaching and chatting, this tea party must have been a great satisfaction for this Witch. Subaru was somewhat reluctant to leave, seeing her unbridled joy and her visible regret to see him go, but he quickly shook his head and severed that sentiment.

It was strange how this Witch managed to pull on his heartstrings, but it wouldn't be good to become too attached to her. She was a Witch, and more than that, she was dead. Though it was unclear which part was actually worse here.

Subaru: "What should I do when I want to come back here?"

Echidna: "You mean how to be invited to the tea party? Oh no no no, we mustn't, you mustn't become too dependent on me. It's true that you have no one you could confess your Return by Death to in the outside world, and I know how much you long for me as the only person you could open your heart to, but I am dead and you are living... No, it can never happen, between us."

Subaru: "When you wriggle around looking strangely happy while saying that it's not convincing at all!"

What was he supposed to do when Echidna suddenly behaves like an overenthusiastic eel-restaurant owner who saw his first customer in years?

Seeing the way Echidna was looking at him with her hand on her cheek, Subaru wasn't sure just how to react. Then, with "Huhuhuhu", she placed her hand over her lips, smiling,

Echidna: "Don't look so troubled. I am a girl, after all, and sometimes I want to have lighthearted conversations like this too. That is all. I am still well aware of the gap between Witch and human."

Subaru: "...Echidna."

Echidna: "The condition to being invited to the tea party is to scream from the depths of your heart, «I want to know», inside my Tomb. The first time, you are invited no questions asked, but the second time onwards will not be so simple. The third time... might be quite difficult, I think. Merely superficial screams won't be able to reach me."

Hearing her quickly explain this, Subaru recalled what had happened immediately before being invited.

He had just Returned by Death after being eaten alive by the rabbits. His body was drowning in the lingering agony of death, and his consciousness was endlessly screaming "What had happened?".

That was when he heard Echidna's invitation. But next time, things would have to be even more desperate than that.

Subaru: "I really... would rather not..."

Echidna: "Precisely. So... this may very well be the last time we meet. Though of course, this would not be the last if you challenge the Trials again."

Same as in the First Trial, it seems she would be waiting for him in the second and the third Trials as well. As long as Subaru challenges the Trials in Emilia's place, their reunion will be assured. In other words,

Subaru: "I'll see you at the next Trial, then? Guess there won't be any tea there."

Echidna: "If you really want a drink, I wouldn't mind brewing you some on the scene..."

Subaru: "No no, I get the feeling that if I see the manufacturing process, I'll want to drink it even less."

Seeing him holding up his palms to say no, Echidna made her most dejected expression yet.

He didn't know why she wanted to push her body fluids on other people so much. Maybe she gets off on having a part of herself become a part of someone else, or some kind of fetish like that... How sinful.

Subaru: "Well, I guess I'll be disappearing soon... Thanks for your hospitality, Echidna. Till we meet again..."

Echidna: "Before that, would you mind?"

Sensing that his body was fading, Subaru tried to say farewell to Echidna. But it was Echidna herself who stopped him.

She stood up from her seat, and, with her funerary dress swaying, she walked to Subaru's side,

Echidna: "You have joined me in my tea party, and acquired some portion of my knowledge... But, aren't you forgetting something?"

Subaru: "Forgetting something?"

Echidna: "My compensation, that is."

Echidna narrowed her eyes, and poked out her tongue at Subaru's tilted head.

Subaru's eyes widened at her words, repeating "Compensation..." under his breath. And with, "Yes, compensation", Echidna nodded,

Echidna: "I charged a toll for our last meeting as well? Dealing with a Witch always comes with a price. The last payment was for last time, so what should I take this time, I wonder?"

Subaru: "C—can't you wait till I'm better off in life? I don't really have much cash on me, and the stuff you charge can be a little too rough on me you know."

Echidna: "Your skills for negotiating with Witches might be a little lacking."

Seeing Subaru pressed into the back of his chair, a sadistic smile emerged on Echidna's lovely face. She looked him up and down, wondering just what to take.

A Witch's compensation— Last time, it was forgetting Echidna's existence after returning to reality. If the same happened this time, then all the information he gained from the tea party, along with any hope of breakthrough, would be lost. Only, he wasn't sure he would be able to afford a different price,

Echidna: "Alright, I've decided."

What's going to happen? Subaru shivered back, as Echidna leaned her body forward and placed her face up against his. While Subaru was busy being shaken by the closeness of her lips to his, she leaned down even further— And reached into the inside of his jacket.

Her soft, white hair brushing against his skin smelled of the faint scent of flowers. Having no immunity to pretty girls, Subaru's brain froze like a brick.

But, not minding Subaru's mental issues, she touched him on his chest,

Echidna: "Then, I'll take this."

Subaru: "...Oo, eh?"

Pulling her hand out of the confounded Subaru's chest— Echidna's white fingers drew out a small handkerchief, fluttering in the wind. White, with gold linings, on its back was an embroidery of the gray Great Spirit,

Subaru: “The handkerchief Petra gave me when I left for the Sanctuary...?”

Echidna: “You should thank the person who gave you this gift. It is imbued with only the pure and powerful emotion of concern for your safety. Every passing of the needle and thread instilled this magic into this object. I am quite fascinated indeed by the power residing here.”

Subaru: “...Petra... did that?”

Echidna: “Someone is very fond of you, it seems. While I must apologize to the child who offered you these thoughts, I will be taking this.”

Echidna’s cheeks softened at the embroidered Puck on the back, before stowing the handkerchief away into her chest. Then, leaving Subaru’s side,

Echidna: “The price for the tea party has been paid. From the bottom of my heart, I look forward to your next visit.”

In an almost joking gesture, Echidna picked up the edges of her dress and performed an impeccable curtsy. Perhaps, she wanted to give him a lighthearted send-off— Noting that it wasn’t like her at all, Subaru stood up from his chair,

Subaru: “Thank you for the treat... and for everything— Until we meet again.”

In the same way, Subaru picked up the hems of his jersey and did a curtsy of his own, prompting a wry smile onto Echidna’s face.

Then, as a white light enveloped the scene— Subaru left the tea party.

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—The first thing Subaru felt as his consciousness returned from the tea party was the cold, hard floor, and the unpleasant taste of dirt in his mouth.

Subaru: “Ugh! Ghpphph! Does that have to happen every time now...!?”

Spitting out the foreign objects in his mouth, Subaru sat up and shook his head, pushing his mind to wake up.

First thing was to confirm his body's condition, and recall what had happened before he woke. When he Returned by Death after being devoured by the Great Rabbit, he was immediately summoned to Echidna's tea party. There, he got mangled by Daphne's eye, proceeded to strengthen his resolve, and was at last saved by Petra's thoughts.

None of it was missing from his memories. And, relieved by this fact,

Subaru: "Looks like Echidna kept her word. The tea party didn't get erased from my memories this time."

This time, the white-haired Witch still remained vivid in his memories.

Even though she had no lack of Witchiness, she did at least keep her promises. In fact, judging from their interactions so far, she might even be among one of the few people he could call an ally. Though it was too bad there wouldn't be many opportunities he could rely on her help,

Subaru: "Can't say I got everything I needed this time... but at least it's something."

Placing his hand over his chest, Subaru thought back to the events of the tea party—to his confession of his Return by Death, and clenched down onto that feeling of salvation.

There, even though it was limited to Echidna and the other Witches, being able to say it out loud and share that burden was already more than he could have hoped for.

And having the chance to hear someone more knowledgeable about this parallel world give her thoughts on Return by Death was just another one of the things he gained. The Witch of Envy was the one who put everything into motion, and when the day comes when he will have to face her, he will be ready.

Subaru: "With that renewed feeling, Natsuki Subaru is reborn! So let me make good use of that Witch's power for now. No matter how many times it takes, I'll spend my life to do it."

If it could get him closer to the answer, he would ask for nothing more.

Subaru: "My sense of time must be off thanks to the tea party, but this is right after the First Trial, isn't it?"

The location of his Return by Death hadn't changed, that was what Echidna told him. Turning his head about to look over his surroundings, he was definitely inside the Tomb.

Having verified this, and deciding that he should start carrying Emilia out of this place, Subaru proceeded to search for her.

Subaru: "Considering this is immediately after Return by Death, and the third time at that, I better think about how to deal with Garfiel... Though I'm pretty sure he won't just try to kill me all of a sudden."

But still, Garfiel was prone to impulsive actions. And it'd be impossible to predict what he will do.

Thinking back to their last encounter and his subsequent death, even though the Great Rabbit was his immediate cause of death, recalling the scene of the slaughter of the villagers made a dark emotion boil within Subaru, beyond his control.

Repel the Great Rabbit, repel Elsa's attack, solve the Sanctuary's mysteries, and settle his debt with Garfiel.

Even if none of it had happened in this world, Subaru was not going to forgive him. One way or another, he will exact his revenge on Garfiel.

Brooding over these thoughts, Subaru's negative feelings towards Garfiel surged ever higher, seeping to the surface. But all these thoughts came to an abrupt end, when,

Subaru: "...Where's Emilia?"

—She was nowhere to be found.

The sense of incongruity made Subaru furrow his brows, desperately trying to peer through the darkness of the Tomb. But he couldn't find Emilia's body anywhere in the narrow room where their Trials took place.

This had never happened before.

Subaru: "Immediately after my Trial, Emilia should still be in the middle of hers..."

Emilia, unable to pass her First Trial, should still be tangled by her past, suffering at Subaru's side.

And yet, she was not in the Tomb. The place and time he returned to, was no doubt inside the Tomb immediately after his First Trial, but,

Subaru: “...”

He had a bad feeling about this.

Emilia’s absence meant deviating from all the conditions so far.

It shouldn’t be possible, not unless Subaru had changed the future. But what could an unconscious Subaru have done to have this kind of influence?

Stirred by unease, Subaru ran out of the Trial room and into the corridor. Then, carrying his reverberating footsteps through the corridor, he came out of the Tomb.

Underneath the moonlight, stepping out of the Tomb, what Subaru saw was—

Arc 4 Chapter 49 - LOVELOVELOVELOVELOVELOVEYOU~ (Part A)

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 11, Chapter 6 “Loveloveloveloveloveloveyou”, Part 2

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken – [Complete \(Part 1\)](#)

—With the dry clasps of footsteps striking upon his eardrums, Subaru felt a sense of unease inside his very skin.

The cold wind flowing into the Tomb was accompanied by an unpleasant stickiness. As if the ground was clinging to his feet as he ran, every step drained him of strength.

Feeling sharp, electrifying sensations all over his exposed skin, it was like his body was being pummeled by objects protruding from the air. Essentially, it was a feeling that made him hesitate to go forward.

—Subaru already knew a feeling very similar to this.

But, urged on by his sense of foreboding, Subaru swept aside the tangling discomfort as he sprinted towards the entrance of the Tomb.

Passing through the moon-lit corridor and the ivy-ridden entrance, with a sensation of breaking through a membrane of air, Subaru came out of the Tomb.

And there, he saw it.

Subaru: “...You gotta be kidding me, oy.”

Subaru’s feet gouged into the earth as he skidded to a stop.

Almost toppling over from the momentum, flooding into Subaru's sight was something in the realm of inconceivable.

So detached from common sense was the scene before his eyes.

Subaru: "A shadow...?"

The mutter that spilled from his lips— summed up just about all of it.

Shadow— was the only way to describe what he was seeing.

The Sanctuary, which was supposed to be visible from the entrance of the Tomb, was nowhere within sight. While it was true that the inhabited area was located quite far away from the Tomb, as far as Subaru was concerned, there was no way he couldn't see a single building from here.

Above all, the full moon was still clear in the sky, pouring its silver glow over all the earth. Yet the world he was seeing was far too dark, as if it was submerged under a shadow.

Subaru: "——"

Gulping down his breath, Subaru made up his mind to set out towards the darkness-befallen Sanctuary. Lifting his soles off the stone slabs, he stepped onto the soil and grass— Or, that should be what it was.

He did feel the sensation of stepping onto a bed of overgrown grass, but his vision, swallowed by the darkness, couldn't actually verify that fact. The sticky sensation on his skin didn't change, either.

Subaru: "E—Emilia—!"

Unable to endure these surreal surroundings, Subaru called out to the first name that appeared in his mind. After calling to the girl most certain in his memories, his thoughts resumed their motion, as the names and faces flashed across his mind,

Subaru: "Ram! Ryuzu-san! And-incidentally-Otto! Are you there!? Please come out!"

If this was immediately after the Trial, they should still be outside the Tomb waiting for Emilia's results. Ignoring their calls to stop him, Subaru had rushed into the Tomb and wound up becoming another participant in the Trials. That had always been what preceded his looping.

Afterwards, when he carried Emilia out of the Tomb, he was always greeted by those usual faces.

This time shouldn't have been any different.

Subaru: "They're not here... But it's not only that... What's with the gloomy atmosphere? Even paddy roads in the countryside aren't this dark..."

Without artificial lighting, the paddy field roads in the night would sink into true darkness in the absence of starlight.

But the Sanctuary's situation was different from that sort of complete darkness. The moon was gleaming overhead, and that gleam was at least falling on Subaru's body.

And yet, that light somehow dissipated before reaching the ground, setting the scene for this vague and uncertain night— It was as if a spotlight was shining on him alone.

The only thing visible in this darkness was himself. Turning to look behind him, even the Tomb he had just come out of had been swallowed into darkness and could no longer be seen.

Memories of walking through the White Whale's fog came back to him.

Having lost the girl he relied on, thrown off the dragon carriage, unsure whether the White Whale's jaws were closing in behind him, and having lost both sense of direction and any reason to go on living, he remembered walking on.

In the end, eventually wandering out of that fog, he was picked up by Otto's favorite dragon, Frufoo.

So this time, if he kept on walking through the darkness, perhaps he would be rescued as well?

Subaru: "What am I, an idiot? —No, I am an idiot. What's with this deadbeat, loser-dog thinking? If I have no idea what happened, no idea what'll happen, don't even know where everyone is, and here I am worrying about myself, idiot."

Hadn't he just confirmed his resolve at Echidna's tea party?

No matter what happens, no matter how much he must suffer, if Subaru could just pay with his life to solve everything in the end, he would consider it a bargain. Compared to losing the people most

important to him and proceeding into an irreparable future, how fortunate it is to be able to exchange his life for the chance to try again.

So, dawdling around embattled by fear in front of an incomprehensible situation, going in circles before meeting a pathetic end to his life was not what Subaru needed to do.

Rather, he should be boldly challenging his incomprehensible circumstances, and even if he fails to reach an answer, he should grasp every clue he could for vengeance in the next life before welcoming a meaningful death.

Subaru: “In any case, what I have to confirm now is...”

Where Emilia, Ram, and everyone else had gone.

When he first saw that Emilia was not in the Tomb, for a moment, Subaru thought that she had passed the Trial, woke up, and left on her own. But he immediately ruled out that possibility. Because if Emilia passed the Trial and woke up safely, there was no reason for her to not wake Subaru.

Subaru knew from experience with Emilia that when someone inside a Trial is touched or called, the Trial would be interrupted.

Although more accurately, Subaru’s consciousness was inside Echidna’s tea party rather than the Trial, so that premise might not apply here.

Subaru: “But still, it’s not like Emilia to leave me and head out by herself.”

She would have tried to pull the unconscious Subaru out of this place, or at least rested him against a wall. He couldn’t imagine that she would just leave without doing anything.

And then, there was also the rather mean conclusion— Subaru didn’t think Emilia was capable of passing the First Trial on the first try.

Knowing that since day one, Emilia had been stuck on the same Trial in every loop, Subaru was skeptical of the idea that she could have cleared it on her own to begin with.

Therefore, Subaru decided that Emilia’s disappearance was probably not according to her own will. Either someone carried her out, or—

Subaru: “Maybe she came back from the Trial completely dazed, and went out without even noticing that I was here... That’s not entirely inconceivable.”

But that still wouldn’t explain how the world outside was plunged into darkness.

Even if Subaru could accept that as the explanation for Emilia’s disappearance, he still couldn’t begin to imagine what the cause and reason of this scene might be.

At least, in Subaru’s experience, the Sanctuary never once became like this while a Trial was taking place.

As for the absence of the people waiting outside, Subaru’s heart shuddered at the possibility that the ferocious white rabbits might be behind it. But he quickly shook his head and denied that hasty conclusion.

According to his calculations, the attack of the Great Rabbit should take place on the night of the sixth day— five days from now. Even if it arrived ahead of schedule, he’d still like to believe that it couldn’t have come on the very first day.

—Although, he was intentionally ignoring the fact that the timing of Elsa’s attack on the mansion had mysteriously changed as well.

That was just another one of the mysteries Subaru had no answers to. But if the date of the Great Rabbit’s attack could randomly change like Elsa’s, then that would leave no room for Subaru to even begin to unravel these circumstances.

Aside from having faith that there was no situation Return by Death couldn’t avert, there was not much Subaru could do.

Subaru: “All I can do now... is call out to Emilia and the others while looking around and head to the cathedral to check on the villagers, I guess...”

Straining his eyes trying to see ahead, it dawned on Subaru just how unfeasible his plan was. Although he had the layout of the Sanctuary more-or-less memorized, it wasn’t to the point of being able to navigate it with his eyes closed.

At this point, even just wandering around this area would require that level of memory power.

Needless to say, getting to his destination safely would be exceedingly difficult. And he couldn't just unconditionally accept the plan of calling out while searching for the others, either.

Subaru: "If this pitch-darkness was somebody's doing... Can't really guarantee whoever I run into will be friendly."

Burning up with anxiety, Subaru continued agonizing over what his best course of action would be.

If he wanted to rendezvous quickly, he should raise his voice and call out. That would be the best way to find out if Emilia and the others were safe. But he was quite aware of the folly of acting blindly from his miserable past experiences. Just how many times had he died in this world because of that?

Subaru: "...Damnit. If I don't at least figure out what's going on, I'll be screwed if I get killed before that."

At the end of his deliberations, Subaru decided to take the cautious approach.

Suppressing his voice and holding down the sound of his breathing, he focused his eyes into the darkness and followed the map in his mind towards the populated area of the Sanctuary.

Only the sensation beneath his feet was certain. It was the only proof of the existence of the reality outside the Tomb and his only reliance in the world painted in darkness. Despite having fallen into pitch darkness, the Sanctuary should still be the same as before—

Subaru: "———Uh?"

Slowly but surely, Subaru carefully landed each step on the grass. But after only a few steps, he stopped.

The reason, was the wind.

Subaru: "———?"

Lifting his face, Subaru somewhat pointlessly looked around in the darkness, hoping to find the source of the ominous breeze.

He felt it. There was something unique about the wind that swept by just now.

It was neither the refreshing breeze passing a field of grass, nor the dusty wind blowing inside the Tomb, nor a wind infused with the blood-soaked scent of a scene of carnage. Instead, it was an air carrying the unmistakable warmth of having touched a living thing.

Subaru: “Wh—”

Unsure of where the wind was blowing from, Subaru looked back in search of the answer.

The Tomb should be directly behind him, but having walked only a few steps away, it was already impossible to see its outlines.

—No, there was a reason other than the darkness why he couldn’t see the Tomb.

Subaru: “———Ah?”

???: “———”

At a distance close enough to feel each other’s breaths, in the world of true dark, someone was standing right before his eyes.

The reason he couldn’t see the entrance of the Tomb, was because that person was blocking his view.

How did he not notice when someone had gotten so close to him? And why did that person not utter a sound when they approached him? In that instant, those questions stormed within Subaru’s mind.

But that storm of questions was soon answered. It couldn’t have been any clearer than that.

???: “—I love you.”

The shadow said to Subaru with a voice so overflowing with affection that it sounded like it was about to melt.

Character Pages for Volume 11



Characters

Re: Life in a different world
from zero

Characters

Re: Life in a different world
from zero

The only ability I got in a different world "Returns by Death"
I die again and again to save her.

ダフネ

Daphne

『暴食』の魔女。両目を × 印になる形の
黒い眼帯、手足は黒の拘束衣で
雁字搦めと外見が非常に特徴的。



テュフォン

Typhon

『傲慢』の魔女。褐色の肌に緑色の髪をした
極々普通の少女に見えるが……。

ミネルヴァ

Minerva

『憤怒』の魔女。金髪碧眼の元気で
潑刺とした健康的な美少女。



Web Novel Volume 12



Arc 4 Chapter 49 - LOVELOVELOVELOVELOVELOVEYOU~ (Part B)

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 12, Chapter 1
“LOVELOVELOVELOVELOVELOVELOVELOVELOVELOVELOVELOVELOLOVE”, Part 1

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken – [Complete \(Parts 2+3\)](#)

It was a murky voice.

A sound so indistinct that Subaru couldn't tell whether it was a man or a woman's.

Compared to a voice passing through a voice changer or one muffled by a cloth, it was even more ambiguous and opaque, as if obscured by some invisible power operating on his perceptions.

But even so, the instant Subaru heard those words— those whispers of love, he instinctively understood who the shadow before him was. And shuddered.

Thinking back, Subaru had already vaguely sensed it before coming out of the Tomb.

The feeling of the thick Miasma stinging his skin. The sight of the Sanctuary submerged in shadows. The stifling pressure engulfing his surroundings. And the world that fundamentally lost its life. It was every bit a reenactment of the time-stopped reality brought about by the uttering of the forbidden words, where Subaru met the Witch.

That is to say, the one standing before him was,

Subaru: “Wh... y...!”

???: “———”

There was no answer. But there was also no doubt that it was right in front of him.

Subaru twitched his fingers, checked that he was still breathing, and confirmed that time hadn't stopped. The second-hand of the world was definitely ticking as it should. And yet the Witch was standing right before him.

Faced with a threat beyond his imaginations, Subaru's mind was painted over with complete white.

The vow which he had sworn only moments before, to uncover the details no matter what happens without letting a single second go to waste, all vanished in the face of that shock. So unexpected, was Subaru's encounter with the Witch at this point in time.

His throat rapidly drying up, Subaru's body stiffened as he forgot how to breathe. Bound by the overwhelming pressure, Subaru turned as rigid as a frog being stared down by a snake.

Becoming immobile now would certainly only make the situation worse. But, even understanding this, Subaru's limbs gave no indication of obeying the blaring alarms.

It was a matter far beyond what Subaru's heart and mind could handle.

Subaru's heart did not falter, and his mind was burning with the need to do something, but his body and the deep-rooted faculties governing it only calmly looked on.

Because— regardless of whether he moved or not, the result would be exactly the same.

???: “———”

There was no hostility emanating from the shadow before his eyes. Nor did it seem to have any intention to hurt him.

But that is not to say that it was uninterested in Subaru.

Quite the opposite.

???: “———”

Tumbling while being bumped by hard objects all over, Subaru finally came to a stop when his whole body was soaked in shadow. Giving his head a shake, his rigid body and thoughts simultaneously broke free.

With the noise filling his mind somewhat clearing up, and despite the lingering heaviness that felt like his head was stuffed with sand, the weight had considerably lightened.

Spitting out the mud in his mouth while looking back towards the direction he tumbled from, Subaru's eyes widened at the sight.

Garfiel: "Can't get much worse than this, oy. Can y'move or not?"

With his back to Subaru, the person facing against the shadow snapped impatiently.

His stature was rather small for a man. With short, golden hair, and a rude way of speaking. He kept his posture low, readied for combat, with his legs drawn back and his fangs bared in caution.

Subaru: "Why... would y... me... Garfiel..."

Garfiel: "Hah? Ain't time t'be jokin' around, can't y'see what's happenin' right now?"

Answering Subaru's voice that was still trembling in shock, Garfiel sounded somewhat annoyed. While keeping his eyes fixed on the shadow in front of him, bit-by-bit, Garfiel edged closer to Subaru,

Garfiel: "I'm gonna grab yer collar 'n jump. Might break yer neck, so pull up some backbone n' bear it."

Subaru: "I don't have the kind of special characteristic where I can use backbone to increase health-points in my neck— Uwah!?"

Right in the middle of his rebuttal, Garfiel dived down with incredible speed, and, true to his word, hoisted Subaru up by the collar, prompting a strangled "Ugh!". But, before Subaru could complain,

Subaru: "———!"

—The ground swelled up, and the shadow exploded.

Waves rolled out from the detonated shadow, lunging towards Subaru and Garfiel, threatening to crush them. In an instant, the surrounding shadows joined into the wave, prompting Garfiel to click his tongue as his feet sank into the black mire while trying to back away.

Garfiel: “Agh, fuck! Divine Protection o’ Earth Spirits can’t work when the ground’s like this—!”

Subaru: “Garfiel, my legs are sinking too!”

Garfiel: “The whole damn place’s like this! T’s what they meant by «If yer bad the Witch gonna be comin’», ain’t it!!”

Being dragged along, the parts of Subaru’s limbs that were touching the ground were beginning to be swallowed by the shadow. It was an entirely different sensation from sinking into water or mud.

Warm, tender, and smooth, it was like silk trying to wrap around him and enshroud his body within. In a more peaceful setting, he might even have thought that it’d be rather nice to be embraced by that feeling.

But in these terrifying circumstances, he’d have to reject that idea.

Garfiel: “Tch, don’t bite yer tongue!!”

With a snort, Garfiel scanned over his surroundings and shouted.

He bent his knees, and lightly leaped his sinking body off the ground. With the shadow tangling to his feet, the jump only managed a few meters, but extending his legs the instant they touched the ground, he leaped again, and again, and again,

Garfiel: “There, we, are—!”

In a world concealed by night, Garfiel beautifully leaped his way to an area populated by buildings. Literally kicking his foot into a wall, he leaped up once again, and, landing on a roof, he tossed Subaru down with a sigh.

Being tossed like that, Subaru quickly grabbed onto some shingles so he wouldn’t slide off, before glancing up at the side of the panting Garfiel’s face— faintly obscured by the darkness,

Subaru: “Th—thanks for saving me...!”

Garfiel: “Huh? Is that the face of someone feelin’ thankful? Y’got a problem with me? Oy!”

Subaru: “Just something I haven’t gotten over yet... and... I never thought you’d come to save me.”

Garfiel: “How heartless did y’think I am? If y’got a problem with me savin’ ya, feel free to jump right back into that shadow if y’want.”

Subaru tersely replied “No thank you” to Garfiel’s retort, and sighed. Garfiel looked away, and Subaru, watching him from behind, felt a flood of complex emotions flowing through his chest.

There was the incomprehensible situation as well, but the biggest reason for this was why did Garfiel choose to save him. Before this, Subaru had considered him the greatest obstacle in the Sanctuary and a target of his resentment on par with Roswaal himself.

Although he was aware that the change in situation must have caused this change in behavior, the complete reversal left Subaru unsure how to react, nonetheless.

But, paying no attention to Subaru’s internal confusion, Garfiel only gazed down towards the ground with a bitter expression. Clicking his sharp canine teeth, “This ‘s bad...”, he muttered under his breath,

Garfiel: “This goes without sayin’, but, doesn’t look like it’s gonna let us off.”

Sliding down to Garfiel’s side, Subaru timidly peeked off the roof.

Witnessing the sight before his eyes, an “Uh...” inadvertently slipped from his lips. The Sanctuary had transformed into a sea of shadow, with its majority swallowed by the pitch blackness, depriving him of all sense of height and perspective.

But even within that darkness, there was an even darker, writhing figure lurking at the center of the whirling shadows, inching closer at a crawling pace.

It was the one who just tried to swallow Subaru and Garfiel into the shadows, the one who flooded the Sanctuary under a sea of shade. It was—

Subaru: “Garfiel... You have any idea what that is?”

Garfiel: “I got «it’s exactly what it looks like», «ain’t no chance it ain’t what I think it is», and «it’d be goddamn wishful thinkin’ t’say that ain’t what that is». Which one y’wanna go with?”

Subaru: “Does which one even matter? They’re pretty much the same thing... Oy, you’re being way calmer in front of this thing than I th...”

Before he could finish his sentence, Subaru stopped when he saw the expression on the side of Garfiel’s face.

Honestly, despite harboring some complicated feelings about how Garfiel saved him, Subaru was nonetheless calmly organizing the situation in his head.

Among them, was why Garfiel, who showed such displeasure at the scent of the Witch— and had turned hostile towards Subaru just because he had picked up the Witch’s Lingering Scent, was not losing his composure when the source of the scent was right before him.

And that was why, just when he was about to ask— Subaru dropped the subject when he caught a glimpse of his face.

Garfiel: “What’d y’just say?”

Garfiel uttered, gazing down with his bloodshot eyes. Subaru might just be imagining this, but Garfiel’s fangs seemed to be growing longer.

Anger. Rage. Wrath. Fury. His pupils had turned into slits, and one could see the pure-red emotions churning within. How could anyone call that calm?

At the same time, Subaru remembered that there was something he had to ask.

Subaru: “—Garfiel. Th... Ram and the others, what happened to them?”

Garfiel: “...”

Subaru: “When I came out of the Tomb, the Sanctuary was already submerged in the shadow. You seem to be alright and lively... So, what about the others...?”

Garfiel: “...In the shadow.”

Subaru's repeated attempts at denial only received this cruel reply.

Hearing Subaru gulp down his breath, Garfiel grunted with a tinge of remorse,

Garfiel: "When we noticed somethin' was off, the ground's already turned into th'shade. If Ram hadn't blown me away with her wind, I woulda been swallowed too."

Subaru: "...and Ram's swallowed just like that? And Ryuzu, and Otto?"

Garfiel: "Aah, yeah. Granny 'n the noisy lil'bro, all'n one go."

Looking down at the strange writhing of the undulating shadow, Subaru's thoughts couldn't help but take a pessimistic turn regarding their chances of survival after being swallowed.

If they were being imprisoned in some alternate dimension, then there might still be hope. But, judging from the sensation of touching that shadow, it would be a far too optimistic possibility.

Subaru: "Wh-what is this, seriously, this... why would that thing suddenly...!"

Elsa, Great Rabbit, Garfiel.

He had only just sealed his resolve to repulse the threats facing the Sanctuary and the mansion, to face down all obstacles and obtain the perfect future no matter the cost.

And yet, just when that resolve was sealed, this incomprehensible thing washed it all away.

Why on earth did this thing burst out all of a sudden?

Subaru: "Garfiel... What happened to Emilia?"

Garfiel: "-----"

Subaru: "I couldn't find Emilia in the Tomb... Was she, swallowed, too?"

Garfiel: "-----"

Noticing that something was wrong when she woke, Emilia must have ran out of the Tomb.

After all, if she saw the Sanctuary being swallowed by shadow, there was no way she would just stand by and watch. She would have jumped in to save anyone she could with no regard for her own safety, and—

Subaru: “If the shadow... Then, she...!”

Garfiel: “After swallowin’ Ram ‘n the others, the shadow went into the Sanctuary and drank everythin’ up. I chased after it and landed a few blows, but it all did jack shit. Then the thing turned back all o’ a sudden, I followed it, and there’s that.”

And that led to what happened just now, it seems.

The shadow was ravaging the Sanctuary, but when it sensed Subaru coming out of the Tomb, it immediately turned around. Then the shadow’s objective was Subaru, after all.

An all-devouring shadow. Bearing whispers of love. And overwhelming power.

Its identity went without saying. But,

Subaru: “Why the hell is the Witch of Envy here...!!”

Garfiel: “Ain’t the time to be askin’ that, oy.”

While Subaru wrenched out these words, beside him, a battle-hungry smile emerged on Garfiel’s face. Taking care not to lose his balance, Subaru stood up as well, clenching his teeth as he locked his gaze onto the same thing as Garfiel.

A great mass of whirling shadow surrounded the building they were using as their foothold.

Everything caught in the cyclone’s range was swallowed. Earth and structure alike were stripped away and forced into its swirling orbit.

Subaru: “Whooooooooooooooooa——!”

It was like a great tsunami or a large-scale flood carrying houses along with its current.

Experiencing the bizarre sensation of supposedly massless shadows uprooting the building beneath his feet, Subaru did all he could not to be flung off the roof.

He tried, but that didn't solve the fundamental problem at all.

Garfiel: "Tch, I'm jumpin' again, grab on!"

Subaru: "———!"

Quickly grabbing onto the crouching Garfiel, they escaped the floating rooftop along with Garfiel's leap. Shooting out like a bullet without regards for target, they plunged right into a flock of trees, snapping branches on the way before slamming into a trunk.

Garfiel: "Ghagh——!"

Punching his arm into the trunk, with that inelegant gesture, Garfiel managed to stop himself from falling into the shadows. Subaru, who was clinging to his shirt, took hold of a branch and shifted himself over, maintaining his posture that way.

And just when they were finally allowed to catch their breath, they heard the loud crack of splintering wood behind them.

Quickly turning to look, they saw the building they had just been standing on being pulled into the center of the vortex, and crushed into thin, tiny pieces.

With the collapse of the building's structure, the shadowy vortex swallowed it into the true body of the shade—— into the heart of the writhing shadow, further enlarging its mass.

Subaru: "———"

Witnessing the devastating destruction left both Subaru and Garfiel at a loss for words.

Passing several seconds in that silence, the shadow's contours began to blur. And the next moment—— Subaru was certain that his eyes met the eyes of the murky, all-encompassing shadow.

Witch of Envy: "——I love you."

Witch of Envy: “I love you I love you I love you I love you I love you—”

[illegible]

Coming to drown him with love, the love of the Witch of Envy was approaching—

Arc 4 Chapter 50 - A Distant Roar

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 12, Chapter 1
“LOVELOVELOVELOVELOVELOVELOVELOVELOVELOVELOVELOVELOVELOVELOVELOVE”, Part 2

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken – [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

Billowing waves of shadows bearing pitch-black affection pressed towards Subaru.

Dangling against the trunk of a large tree, barely holding onto a branch, Subaru had no means of escape. He glanced over to Garfiel beside him, only to see that,

Subaru: “Garfiel!?”

Garfiel let go of the branches, releasing himself into a freefall before landing on the ground. The shadow-infused surface rushed to pull at his feet, but Garfiel, not minding it, swung down his arms as if to pierce into the ground, placing all four limbs in contact with the earth,

Garfiel: “Like hell am I waitin’ around t’get swallowed! Wwwwrraaaaahh—!!”

Roaring, Garfiel flung up the arms he had stabbed into the ground.

And along with his motion, the shadowy surface of the earth heaved upwards like a table-flip of massive proportions— Rising to meet the dark, surging wave only inches away from engulfing them.

With clods of soil hurtling into the air alongside the sound of a violent crack, the upturned earth crashed into the shadow. But the impact against the supposedly massless shadow only lasted for an instant, before the storm of earth was swallowed just like the building before it.

The shadowy wave rose higher, its breadth widened, and its hue deepened. The more it swallowed the more vicious it grew— The maneuver had bought them but the smallest delay.

Garfiel: “If y’don’t get yer ass down I’m leavin’ ya behind!”

Subaru: “Whooooa—!”

While gazing, dumbstruck, at the unfolding sight before him, a sudden impact knocked Subaru off the branch, sending him plummeting to the ground. But just before he could crash into the earth, Garfiel struck out his arm and nabbed him by the waist, bringing him to an abrupt stop. With his eyes rolled back, beginning to understand what happened,

Subaru: “Y—you didn’t have to kick me down!?”

Garfiel: “Yer bein’ too slow decidin’. I think that thing’s got a crush on ya. Nevermind me, if y’get caught yer gettin’ swallowed up in a second.”

Still holding Subaru in his grip, Garfiel nudged his chin at the ever-enlarging shadow with a feral grin. Following his gaze to the root of the shadow— Subaru could see the faint outline of a person, single-mindedly reaching out its hand to him.

???: “I love you I love you I love you I love you I love you I love you I love you I love you I love you I love you I love you I love you I love you I love you I love you I love you I love you—”

Despite the distance separating them, he could hear that murky voice as though it was being whispered into his ears.

Defying the laws of physics, as if their distance meant nothing, the abnormality of this voice sickened him to the core.

Watching that shadow directing its dark, immense passion towards him, unbearable disgust and revulsion surged up Subaru’s chest.

It was the reason he could Return by Death, and in a sense, he was in its debt.

But it was impossible. It was impossible to accept it. Biologically, and from his very soul, he was rejecting it. In fact, he would rather jump into the mouth of the White Whale than be embraced by that shadow.

Subaru: “Garfiel, what do we do...!”

Garfiel: “Backin’ off’s all we got! Even that bastard Roswaal can’t be counted on here. Ram ‘n Granny... and th’others didn’t stand a chance against that thing.”

Garfiel gnawed his fangs and ruefully growled under his breath.

Unlike Subaru, he had seen that shadow swallow Ram and Ryuzu with his own eyes. So it wasn’t hard to imagine what he must be feeling.

But since Subaru still harbored such hateful memories of Garfiel, it became all the more complicated to now see him in grief.

Subaru: “———!”

If the writhing shadow could be compared to a giant palm, then its fingers suddenly lunged out towards Subaru and Garfiel. At the last second, gripping Subaru tightly, Garfiel backstepped out of the way. By treading on ground that was less saturated in shadow, if he could just widen their distance from the heart of the shade, they should at least be able to avoid plummeting into the bog.

Subaru: “Even if we keep running, things won’t get any better... What happened to your attacks?”

Garfiel: “I can’t break through th’shadow’s dress. Might be a different story if I get a full-powered attack in, but can’t make th’opportunity t’do it.”

Taking a large leap backwards, Subaru and Garfiel exchanged their thoughts while flying through the gaps between the trees. Their speed should have easily left the shadow on the other side of the forest, but somehow, they just couldn’t seem to shake the darkness, slowly inching closer.

Perhaps, this inescapable closeness was just the shadow’s Authority. But that was not the only abnormality.

Garfiel: “...Shit.”

Spitting, Garfiel grunted in irritation.

His shoulders were heaving with ragged breathing. Profuse amounts of sweat were emerging on his forehead, and every movement carried a sense of incongruity that Subaru had never seen from him before.

It didn't appear to be fatigue from carrying Subaru's weight.

Seeing this, Subaru furrowed his brows. And, noticing Subaru's reaction, "Tch", Garfiel clicked his tongue,

Garfiel: "My body's gettin' unusually heavy. —Th'fuckin' shadow's sucking all the lifeforce around it."

Subaru: "You mean the shadow beneath us!?"

Panicking at Garfiel's answer, Subaru squirmed himself away from the shadow even though his feet weren't actually touching the ground— Shivering at the endless darkness covering over all the grass.

And only then, did the true threat of the shadow finally dawn on him.

Subaru: "Oy, no way—"

—The forest was falling.

The trees of the forest surrounding the Sanctuary were tall, boasting a canopy thick enough to conceal the moon and stars. But now, the forest sky was filling clearly into his eyes. It wasn't because the trees were cut down, or that the leaves were burned away. The rows of green treetops were still there, their leaves rustling in the wind.

—But the forest had fallen so low that Subaru's head would pop out if he jumped.

Subaru: "The forest is sinking—!?"

Garfiel: "Same'll happen t' us if we don't keep movin'. I'm guessin' that thing gets more powerful the more it eats—!"

Having spread to the ends of the Sanctuary, the shadow's power grew, and was now swallowing the entire forest into darkness. Front, back, left, right, the shadow spanned as far as Subaru's eyes could see. Even if they crossed the barrier or left the forest, there would still be no end to this despair.

Subaru had been so distracted by the unprecedented development and the long-overdue appearance of the Witch of Envy that he had misjudged the threat his enemy posed.

This was the Witch of Envy—the one who once swallowed half the world, whose marks still gripped the present world in terror, the utmost of calamities.

Subaru: “That thing won’t actually end up covering half the world, will it...?”

Garfiel: “Story goes that it swallowed countries whole. Might wanna know that before shruggin’ it off.”

Garfiel sneered, confirming Subaru’s fears. The visible exhaustion on his face must be due to the Witch’s influence, and as the rate of the shadow’s encroachment accelerated, the sensation of sinking into the earth grew stronger.

Every step seemed to sink deeper than the last, and the effort behind each stride exponentially rose. The truth is, if Garfiel was alone, he could probably escape—

Subaru: “Garfiel, that thing is after me. So...”

Garfiel: “If yer fuckin’ tellin’ me t’drop ya, I’m gonna bite yer fingers off one-by-one, oy!”

Being turned down before he could even voice his proposal, Subaru fell silent. But, quickly shaking off his dejection, Subaru resumed glaring into the side of Garfiel’s sweat-drenched face,

Subaru: “This isn’t the time to be saying that! We’re both going to be eaten like this! If I face that thing, I should at least be able to buy us some time. Meanwhile you...”

Garfiel: “I should run? Or y’sayin’ I should go get that bastard Roswaal? First thing that shadow did was head for the center of th’village... Th’villagers and refugees, ‘n Roswaal... They’re all eaten already.”

Subaru: “—Gah. Y...you’re absolutely sure?”

Garfiel: “Y’didn’t see, but the whole Sanctuary was swallowed. Long as they didn’t all go on a spontaneous moon-watchin’ trip into th’forest, I’m sure.”

Plainly conveying this, there was no emotion in Garfiel’s words. In contrast to his usual over-emotional attitude, it only showed that he was telling the truth.

Not just the defenseless refugees or the peaceful residents of the Sanctuary, but even Roswaal was eaten. If that was the case, then the situation was nothing short of hopeless.

For Garfiel, who specializes in close-quarter combat, the long-reaching attacks of the Witch of Envy could be said to be his worst matchup.

If only they had Roswaal or Ram here, perhaps they would still have stood a chance with a coordination of close and long-range attacks.

Subaru: “But that just means without you, there’ll be no way left to oppose it...”

Garfiel: “Granny! Ram! And everyone else! They’ve all already been eaten...!”

Subaru: “———!”

Garfiel: “On top of that, y’want me t’abandon you too? Y’want me t’shame myself...? Never, never, never gonna do that. Fuckin’ «Paragurara’s scars don’t fade»!! ain’t gonna be satisfied ‘till I bash that thing up!!”

Garfiel bared his fangs, barking. His expression was of boundless rage towards the shadow— Perhaps, there was something else as well, or was Subaru just overthinking it?

Having had everyone precious stolen from him, barks of rage couldn’t be the only thing dominating his heart— If he, Garfiel, was that kind of person,

Subaru: “Then why did you do that to everyone...”

Why was he so cruel to tear the defiant villagers to pieces?

Garfiel should know the pain of having someone taken from him, and know the anguish of loss. If he did, then he should be capable of empathy.

Then why did he take his cruelty so far?

Garfiel probably had no idea what Subaru’s wrenched out question was asking.

He only wordlessly tightened his grip on Subaru, showing no intention of letting him go. He ran, same as before, or rather, as the encroaching shadow accelerated, Garfiel was putting more and more force into his steps to escape, leaping forward, and forward, flying out of the sinking forest.

Torn between Garfiel's obstinance and the threat behind them, the sudden expansion of his visual field made Subaru lift his face in surprise.

Shooting out of the sinking forest, the two flew out into a clearing. At last, it was an area where the shadow's influence was still weak. He could see naked earth, and short, stunted flowers, but, most shocking of all,

Subaru: "—Eh!?"

The moment it entered his eyes, Subaru's body was tossed onto the turf.

Grunting in shock as he rolled on the ground, he clutched the soil to stop himself, then shook his head. But, more than the desire to express his indignation at being thrown, was the need to ask about what he was seeing. That is,

Subaru: "Why is Ryuzu-san here—?"

Standing in front of Subaru's trembling voice was a little girl with long, pink hair— Or so she appeared, despite the ancient person inside. Ryuzu.

Seeing the girl standing there at the back of the clearing, watching him with her vast, boundless gaze, Subaru wavered.

Surely, Garfiel had just told him that she was swallowed by the shadow.

But that was clearly at odds with what he was seeing.

If he had to choose which one to believe in, he could only choose to believe the reality in front of his eyes. In that case, was all their previous conversation just a lie?

Subaru: "Garfiel, what is this..."

Garfiel: "...Don't go jumpin' t'conclusions. I know what y'wanna say 'n ask, but we ain't got time for that, now that we lured that thing here."

Dismissing Subaru with a wave of his hand, Garfiel cast his gaze over his surroundings. Then, lifting his chin and drawing in a deep breath,



Illustration from Volume 12, coloring by u/Y_alruqaishi ([source](#))

Garfiel: “———WWWWWWWWWWooooorrrrrrrrrRRRRR!”

Although its volume fell short of covering the entire expanse of the forest, like a distant howl, the call pierced through the wondrously silent air.

Hearing it, for a moment, the rather out-of-place thought occurred to Subaru, “That guy’s super good at making animal noises”, but it soon gave way when he saw the answer to that howl.

Subaru: “———!?”

Accompanied by the sound of rustling, one after another, small silhouettes stepped out of the foliage and into the clearing.

Short in stature, their long, pink hair was almost dragging on the ground. Their skins were translucent-white, and their eyes devoid of emotion. The robes they wore seemed unfitting for their size, with sleeves dangling way past the tip their hands. They didn’t seem to be wearing any other garment underneath, and, peeking between the gaps, he could see that they were barefoot.

The number of figures stepping out of the tree line must have totaled about twenty or so.

Lining up to fill almost half of the clearing, they all bore the exact same face. Not just the same expression— But the same face.

Subaru: “What kind of, joke is...”

Garfiel: “Woulda preferred if I didn’t have t’show ya.”

Garfiel’s pained mutter failed to enter Subaru’s stricken ears. Or rather, despite entering his ears, they failed to register any proper meaning in his brain. Seeing the girls with identical faces lined up before his eyes— all looking exactly like Ryuzu, gave Subaru the illusion that he might be dreaming.

Truth is, Subaru had these kinds of nightmares before, and he had hoped that this was just another one of them. But,

Subaru: “The scratches from the branches hurt... and my heart too... This is real, isn’t it.”

Checking the blood seeping from his arms, and pressing against the sharp pounding of his heart, Subaru took a deep breath. And then, having resolved to accept this scene as reality, he scanned his eyes over the girls once more.

They all looked exactly the same as Ryuzu, and even their expressions were identical. That is to say, they were all emotionless, unmoving, and doll-like.

Even though Subaru knew that Ryuzu was never an especially lively person, she was always abundant in emotion, and, more importantly, her every action resembled that of a living human being.

Subaru: “———”

But that characteristic feeling of living human beings was entirely absent from these girls.

They were like dolls. There could be no description more accurate than that. One could even say they were dolls. Despite breathing and carrying life, they were no more than moving dolls— Such, was the abnormality of seeing twenty identical faces arranged in a row.

Subaru: “Clones... This world can’t have that kind of technology. Is it some kind of replication magic...? But then why make so many Ryuzu-sans...”

When the term “somatic cell cloning” flashed across his mind, Subaru suddenly realized it.

Why the Sanctuary was called the Experimental Grounds, and why its master, Echidna, was so reluctant to talk about it. And then, there was also why Garfiel repeatedly cursed this place as a deadlock.

Subaru: “Unless, this is the result of the Sanctuary’s experiments...? Replicating Ryuzu-san? No... But, what’s the point of doing something like that...”

Garfiel: “Sorry t’do this when yer busy ponderin’, but looks like it’s about time.”

While Subaru’s mind was turning at an incredible speed, beside him, Garfiel’s arms began to expand. His arms, covered over with golden hair, swelled to rip through his clothing as muscles bulged to three times their original width.

Atavism— If the giant tiger was Garfiel’s true form, then this partial transformation was merely the first stage of his trump card.

Garfiel: "Surround it n' crush it. Simple, but with e'ryone else eaten, this is all that's left."

Subaru: "...I can understand what your plan is, but they're..."

Garfiel: “Don’t worry. They ain’t like Granny, their insides’re empty. But they can follow orders at least. If they can just create an openin’, we’re set.”

Whether it was the details of his strategy, or about Ryuzu's replicants, there were still too many questions Subaru wanted to ask. But there was no time for that, or for carrying on a peaceful conversation, for that matter.

With a swipe of his massive arm, Garfiel pushed Subaru to the very back of the clearing. Then, at Garfiel's brutish signal, the Ryuzu-formation pressed forward to shield Subaru behind them.

Garfiel stood himself in the dead center of the clearing. Behind him, were the Ryuzu clones, and at the tail end, was Subaru. All the while, swallowing the trees of the forest, on the opposite end of Garfiel's glare,

[illegible]

With slow, writhing movements, the words of love seeped from the edge of the forest.

Boundless revulsion and blaring alarms crying danger rang ceaselessly inside his skull. Then, the Witch's shadow lifted what should be its head, and caught Subaru within its sights,

Subaru: “_____”

Before he knew it, he could see the shadow undulating with joy.

Surrounded by a black vortex sweeping the trees of the forest into its spiral, amidst the sound of crushing wood, whispering love, the shadow stepped closer.

Defiling the grass of the clearing, it took only an instant for the expanding darkness to usurp this small patch of earth. Before long, everything here would be sinking into the shadow just as the forest had.

So if Garfiel was to have any chance of winning, it would have to be before this place was engulfed by the shadow. That is, now. This very moment.

Garfiel: “———Ghrrraaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhh!!”

Tilting his head to the sky, Garfiel’s throat expelled a roar that quaked the atmosphere.

The violent tremors tearing through the air petrified Subaru’s every organ with instinctive terror. Before the frozen Subaru, not only Garfiel’s arms, but his legs had transformed into those of a beast, slamming to the ground with all its force.

Instantly, with the ruptured earth under Garfiel’s foot as the pivot, the ground beneath the Witch sprang up like a giant seesaw.

It was every bit a reenactment of Garfiel’s first meeting with Subaru, where he flipped Patrasche and the carriage clean off the ground.

As the shadow was launched into the air alongside clumps of swept-up earth, Garfiel lowered his posture, placing all four limbs onto the ground. And, with a howl, he spurred on the next stage of his transformation.

Unable to withstand his expanding body, his clothes burst into slithers of rags dangling from his golden fur. Held up by lumbering limbs, his body grew to exceed four meters in length, as dagger-like fangs lined inside his jaw.

This was none other than the manifestation of the great tiger that had once conferred on Subaru such fury and despair.

Garfiel: “———WRRRRRR!!”

Roaring, the beast’s body tore through the wind, lunging for the shadow.

Causing the foothold to cave in beneath its paws, the mighty beast leaped with astounding speed, in defiance of its enormous mass.

And, just as it flung open its jaws, threatening to crush the shadow’s slender waist with fangs that could shear through steel—

Witch of Envy: “———”

—Fingers of shadows reached out from beneath the leaping beast and wound it within its grasp. Intercepted like this, the great tiger stopped mid-air. And, the moment after, a throat-rending shriek rang out.

A mist of blood burst from the tiger’s constricted limbs, practically announcing the shadow’s intent to crush them in its grip. Arms as thick as Subaru’s waist began producing the sound of ripping flesh.

Subaru watched the great tiger, shrieking and immobilized mid-air, but couldn’t tear his eyes away. And from there, the shadow mercilessly snapped the beast’s body into an explosion of organs and blood—

Subaru: “—Ah—”

—was not what happened.

While Subaru watched on in a daze, two Ryuzu replicants leaped into the fray between the tiger and the Witch.

The little girls shot forward, panting pointlessly with open mouths. With incredible speed, they passed through the shadow, and, landing on the ground, they darted towards the Witch whose gaze was transfixed on the tiger held high in her grip.

Ryuzu clones: “Uu—”

Subaru: “———”

Spreading their arms, they threw themselves at the Witch as if to hug her. But the Witch, having noticed their approach, easily skewered them in place with an outstretched shadow.

The sharp, spear-tipped shadow, with the motion of a whip slinging to their prey, severed the two Ryuzu clone’s legs from under them before skewering them through the waist. Then, it brought them next to the shrieking Garfiel, as if to show him.

A far too abominable sight, but that laxness was the Witch’s mistake.

Garfiel: “—wwWWRRRRRRRRRRRR!”

When he saw the replicants' mutilated bodies brought before him, Garfiel's tremoring throat, already tearing from shrieks of agony, let out a roar of an entirely different hue that forced Subaru's brows to furrow.

Confused as to the meaning of that change in tone, before Subaru eyes, he saw the hanging bodies of the Ryuzu clones rapidly engulfed by an abounding, pale-blue light—

Subaru: “———!?”

???: “———”

The next instant, the bodies exploded with a blinding flash.

There were no blood or organs, or any gory indications that a living organism had exploded. Their flesh merely transformed into particles of light, blasting clear the surrounding shadows and returning a brief moment of life to the world. Blown and scattered— but unlike any ordinary death by explosion.

Blinded by the flash of light, Subaru violently rubbed his eyes. And, hurriedly regaining his vision, his eyes opened in time to see the wall of Ryuzu clones that was shielding him rushing towards the shadow just as the first two had done before them.

Dispersing in all directions, with impeccable coordination, the eighteen Ryuzu clones surrounded the Witch. Apparently having no other means of attack, their only aim was to stick themselves onto the Witch as they closed in their encirclement with their arms spread wide.

But, even with their coordinated advance, the replicants' movements were still constrained by human limits. Not to mention that their adversary was the primal calamity called the Witch of Envy.

Just when Subaru thought it was about to be swamped by the Ryuzu clones, the tip of the up-surgingshadow split into eighteen strands. Each becoming a blade, as if mocking the Ryuzus' efforts to evade them, the whips sliced through their skulls, torsos, abdomens, piercing and slashing, rending them to shreds.

Despite spacing out their attacks, the Ryuzu clones were annihilated, and, after the passing of a single beat, all the Ryuzu replicas exploded in a pulse of white light— temporarily expelling all darkness from the clearing, and stripping away the vortex of shadow that surrounded the Witch.

Garfiel: “—WRRRRRRRRRRRAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHH!”

There was no way the wound-ridden tiger could allow this opportunity to slip away.

Using the opening created by the Ryuzu clones’ charge to free himself from bondage, the moment after the replicants exploded, with a roar that surpassed all that came before, the giant beast lunged for the shadow’s head.

The Witch erected a wall of shade to meet the giant tiger rushing towards her, but the tiger, holding the silhouette of a person on the tip of his claw— a Ryuzu-replicant which it had hidden for this very purpose, slammed it into the wall, blasting it apart. Through the pale-blue flash of light, his fangs and claws fell upon the heart of the shadow.

—It was so perfect that even Subaru was convinced that he had it.

An inhumane tactic that unhesitatingly sacrificed twenty-one Ryuzu-replicants. If the tiger-morphed Garfiel could land a single direct strike with its claw, surely, even a Witch couldn’t hope to survive—

Witch of Envy: “—I love you.”

Or at least, that was what Subaru implored in his heart,

Witch of Envy: “—Subaru-kun.”

The shadow called sweetly, as Garfiel’s burst-open corpse shattered into dust.

Subaru: “———”

He couldn’t utter a word.

Until not long ago, there were more than twenty lives in this clearing including the Ryuzu clones. And several seconds later, there was now only two.

Actually, if one counted from the beginning, there would have been over a hundred lives in the Sanctuary. Considering that they were all pulled in by that shadow, the weight of that shadow’s crimes was simply far too great. Beyond unforgivable.

Blood resumed coursing through Subaru’s numbed senses once again, and every cell of his body rallied into that most fitting response.

That is, the primal emotion directed at the Witch before his eyes— Rage.

???: “I love you—”

Subaru: “Shut up.”

???: “I love you I love you I love you I love you I love you I love you I love you—”

Subaru: “I said shut up...!”

The shadow’s outline was so vague that even its height could not be distinguished.

Its voice was still murky as though passing through a voice changer, impossible to tell whether it was a man or a woman’s.

Yet, in spite of its indefinite voice, the sticky affection imbued within was clear to the point of revulsion. With the same, unwavering love, after drinking the Sanctuary dry and brutally murdering Garfiel, she still directed her interest, her care, and her love wholeheartedly towards Subaru.

It was so abhorrent and twisted it made Subaru want to vomit.

He could feel his sanity being whittled away by the Witch. An emotion bordering on madness surged up, while hatred and revulsion boiled within his chest.

???: “I love you I love you I love you my love I love you I love you I love you”

Standing there, unmoving, the Witch continued to whisper her love to Subaru like a curse.

Instilling it with such warmth it was as if she was about to melt, her inability to read the mood must have been even worse than Subaru’s. Oblivious to the blatant discomfort on the face of the target of her love, she went on pushing her obstinate, one-sided affection.

This love was entirely repulsive.

And what enraged Subaru more than anything, was—

???: “I love you I love you I love you I love you I love you I love you I love you—”

Subaru: “...”

???: “I love you I love you I love you I love you— Subaru-kun.”

Subaru: “—Don’t call me that!!”

Hearing that tender suffix, Subaru screamed back, overtaken by rage.

Every ounce of that doting voice, gesture, and address offended Subaru’s very senses.

Subaru: “Who gave you permission to call me that... Don’t make me laugh. Don’t fucking make me laugh! Don’t you fucking make me laugh!!”

Her closeness at his side.

The affection instilled in that call.

That loveliness at a distance close enough to touch.

There was only one person in the world who was permitted to address him this way.

—And it was certainly not this Witch standing before him.

Subaru: “You’re just a filthy Witch, so don’t make me laugh. There is only one person that right belongs to. And I won’t let anyone else have it. No... Even if it’s one strand of hair, one fragment of a cell, or just a speck of dirt under my nails I won’t fucking waste it on you—!”

Witch of Envy: “———”

Furious, abandoned to rage, Subaru spewed out the emotions spiraling inside him.

His shoulders heaved with ragged breaths as he glared at the Witch in front of him.

An enemy he had no chance of winning against. A monster who ate half the world. Who had just disposed of Garfiel without breaking a sweat. A Witch among Witches.

The utmost calamity plunging all life into shadow, with no other interest besides continuously whispering her deranged love for one single person.

The fact that he dared to face such a monster surprised even himself. It must be his brain short-circuiting in a state of self-abandon, he thought.

If the Witch felt like it, she could easily pull Subaru into the shadowy mire in the blink of an eye. Or otherwise skewer him through with the tips of her shadows and use him to fertilize the forest in a gory firework-show like with Garfiel.

Yet, despite knowing this, why wasn’t his heart faltering as he faced her? Perhaps it was because, deep down, Subaru subconsciously harbored a certain confidence in the Witch. That is——

???: “———”

Subaru: “...Not, moving?”

Recovering from the emotional outburst, Subaru found himself at a loss when none of the expected reactions came from the Witch.

Before he knew it, the curse-like whispers of love—— that endless outpour of affection that persisted even as Garfiel was burst open, had stopped. Halted.

The shadow's erosion of the clearing seemed to have stalled—or rather, stopped completely. Distancing himself from the unpleasant sensation of the shadow beneath his feet, Subaru picked a less shadowy spot and moved himself over.

He kept his gaze fixed on the Witch as he did so, but saw no reaction.

The Witch only stood there with her arms dangling, her body shrouded as always in a shade dense enough to bend light, hiding her expression from sight.

She seemed to be so covered with openings that if he just went over and punched her, she would probably fall.

Subaru: “Why’re you suddenly so... Unless, was it what I said?”

“Impossible”, he thought, while frowning at his inability to deny it.

It was hard to believe that Subaru's words could have had such an effect but considering the point where the Witch's speech and movements stopped, there was just no other explanation.

Though that did not make the possibility any easier to accept.

Subaru: “If my rejection threw you off that much...”

Then if he had just screamed it out earlier, Garfiel and others may not have died.

Now that Emilia, Ram, Ryuzu, Otto, and even Garfiel, who was trying to protect him, all lost their lives to the Witch, there was already nothing left in this world for Subaru to live for.

Echidna had just assured him that there was no limit to Return by Death. And, though he wasn't aware of it himself, he was beginning to become complacent with life.

That was why he withdrew his plan to be the bait immediately after Garfiel rejected it, wasn't it? Seeing that the Witch was so obsessed with him, Subaru should have known that such an action from him would provoke a reaction like this.

Subaru: “I don't know why, but... that means I'm the Witch's weak point, doesn't it...?”

If all this was due to her unwavering obsession with Subaru, then that might just be the case. The problem is, even after knowing this, would he really have an opportunity to use it?

After all, the circumstance of every Sanctuary loop so far had been different. They had Subaru scrambling to find the solutions without a single clue in sight— But in comparison, the difference in this loop was truly extraordinary.

Elsa, Garfiel, and the Great Rabbit were already unmanageable enough to begin with, but if the Witch of Envy were to be added to the fray, it would be nothing short of impossible. Even his will to discern the pattern of her appearance, as he would with the former three, was wilting.

Such was the overwhelming threat of the grotesque existence of the Witch.

Even formulating plans to resist felt ridiculous. Managing to cripple his will to fight before the fight had even begun, compared to the gargantuan White Whale, the Witch's small figure was infinitely more frightening.

???: “———”

Even though the Witch only stood there motionlessly, Subaru could feel his heart withering away. The Witch made no effort to move. Nor did she seem to mind the turmoil of Subaru's thoughts. She simply stood there, immersed in her own world.

Time passed in this state of indecision.

His breathing, the irritatingly loud beating of his heart, and the sensation of profuse, lukewarm sweat rolling down his forehead all informed him of the passage of time. Even if they continued staring at one another, no resolution would come. And just when Subaru drew in a deep breath, intending to take action—

A thought flashed across his mind. That is,

Subaru: “—Could it be... because of Echidna's tea party?”

Witch of Envy: “———”

Subaru: “I ran my mouth on all the forbidden information while I was in her Citadel... I thought if the penalty didn’t come then I was allowed to do it there, but...”

—What if he wasn’t?

What if the Witch never gave Subaru the permission to reveal his Return by Death? What if she saw him so carelessly spilling the words and had tried to inflict punishment as always in the world frozen in time?

What if, unable to manifest in the Witch’s tea party to interfere, she instead chose to deal him a different punishment?

—What if that was the truth of the disaster that befell the Sanctuary?

Subaru: “Just how... selfish are you...?”

Was this massacre just because she couldn’t exact punishment on Subaru?

Did she think that she had the right? With this flagrant show of force, who was she trying to show off to?

Witch of Envy: “I love you.”

At that point, Subaru’s thoughts seemed to have arrived on a corner of the truth.

The Witch, who had been as still as a silhouette, suddenly resumed her revolting activity. She turned her eyes and what seemed to be her head to Subaru, and continued her curse-like murmur.

As if the loving whispers ratified the movements of the shadow, darkness once again began to erode the surface of the clearing. Feeling his soles sinking into the mire, Subaru quickly jumped off that patch of ground.

Subaru: “What’s with you... As soon as I mention another girl’s name you get lively all of a sudden, oy!”

Witch of Envy: “I love you I love you I love you I love you—”

Subaru: “No matter how many times you mutter that, I’m not going to love you! My heart’s numbers one and two places have already been filled. There’s absolutely no room for a Witch to come in!”

Exchange blow for blow— even if the only words coming from the Witch’s mouth were monotone repetitions of love.

But, when he sensed a definite twinge of emotion in response to his provocations, Subaru’s cheeks twisted into a wicked grin. Getting on other people’s nerves was precisely his strong suit, and it was time to test whether it worked on Witches.

Subaru: “If you keep on repeating «I love you» so lightly, they’ll just get cheapened.”

Witch of Envy: “I love you I love you I love you I love you I love you I love you I love you I love you—”

Subaru: “The first real «I love you» I got in this world... had the power to make a piece of no-good human garbage aspire to become a hero, you know!”

Enough to make the broken, twisted coward who only knew how to flee face his challenge head-on for a future he was on the verge of giving up on, and provide him with the strength to do so not only once, but time and time again.

Such was the strength, nobility, and greatness of genuine love.

Subaru: “So all your whispers of love can’t reach my ears at all. Especially when you committed such atrocities for some jealous fit. There isn’t a single thing I like about you.”

???: “I love you I love you I love you—”

Subaru: “If I had to love a Witch like you...”

???: “I love you I love you I love you I love you I love you—”

What was the one thing he should say to hurt this Witch the most? Unrivalled in his ability to piss other people off, Subaru knew exactly what.

And so, with a cruel smile, and eyes filled with disdain,

Subaru: “If I had to love a Witch, Echidna and the other Witches are way more lovable than you—”

???: “———”

The moment he said those words, the Witch's curses ceased. And—

Subaru: “———Ah.”

Subaru's vision, and the world, were instantly swallowed into darkness.

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The shadows shot forth with tremendous mass and momentum as Subaru helplessly watched on.

The black arms extending from the Witch's feet looked terribly similar to Petelgeuse's Unseen Hands. But they differed in that while Subaru could easily avoid the Unseen Hands once he saw them, the Witch's hands rushed with a speed nearly impossible to avoid.

And so, in the matter of an instant, Subaru's eyes saw himself being enveloped by shadows and lifted high over the treetops, before being pulled back down in front of the Witch at a speed faster than freefall.

The whole course of the attack happened faster than his consciousness could process, and the upheaval of his organs from the sudden lurch sent vomit spouting from his lips.

Subaru: “Ugh, huuu... Ugh.”

Unable to keep his consciousness straight, his vision spun round-and-round.

His feet were off the ground, and his entire body felt like it was wrapped in something soft and cloth-like. Although his bondage wasn't tight, his movements were completely sealed, and he couldn't find a single point where he could apply force to break out.

He tried struggling from the tips of his fingers to his toes, but only the part above his neck responded to his commands, while the rest all yielded to the enshrouding shadow. At last, with his vision clearing, Subaru's throat froze as he caught the vast, shadowy mass within his sight.

—Before his eyes, as in right up against his eyes, the Witch stood so close that he could almost feel her breathing.

His heart, which he had managed to distract with rage and rebellion up to now— was suddenly stripped bare in the face of the Witch's reworded calls.

Resolving not to falter no matter what she does or say, he had forced himself to keep his head held high.

Facing off the Witch of Envy, he thought he had understood the root cause of her obstinance.

But that meager courage and overhasty conclusion were both pulverized into dust.

Aberration. Abnormal. Enthralled. Insane. Malefactor. Malevolent. Witch.

Understanding that her continued whispers of love would receive none in return, this time, she was requesting love through brute force. Rather than greed, it was more along the lines of shallowness.

And there, he realized it.

The Witch desired Natsuki Subaru, but she wasn't seeing Natsuki Subaru at all.

What the Witch saw wasn't Subaru, but the vessel named Natsuki Subaru. She wanted a superficial Subaru and wished to be loved by a superficial Subaru. Whether or not his feelings were genuine was no concern of hers.

To love Natsuki Subaru, and be loved by Natsuki Subaru. That was the Witch of Envy's entirety, and her reason for destroying the world.

—It made no sense at all.

Understanding this much, the question in Subaru's chest was right back to where it started.

That is, why was the Witch so obsessed with him in the first place?

They've never met or talked before. In fact, this was the first time they'd actually seen each other.

So why in the world would she be so madly in love with him?

He had no idea. There was no logic to it at all. It'd be easy to say that love was never something to be measured by common sense, but the Witch's love had taken that to an entirely different level.

Witch of Envy: “Love me love me love me love me love me love me love me love me love me——”

The Witch was mistaking superficial love for the genuine one.

Chances were, if Subaru just said the words, the Witch would have released him from his bondage.

If this was the usual sly, crafty, pragmatic Subaru, he might have even replied with some cringeworthy, grandiloquent response to her professions of love. But,

Subaru: “——I hate you.”

Witch of Envy: “———”

Subaru: “I am never, going to love you.”

Pronouncing this rejection from his very soul, Subaru refused the Witch of Envy’s request.

Witch of Envy: “———”

Hearing this answer, the Witch fell silent once again.

Not many humans could claim to have dashed a Witch’s hopes so many times like this. Subaru derived a small, pointless gratification from this fact. And then, his altitude slowly began to drop.

Wrapped in his shadowy shroud, Subaru’s body that was held in the air was slowly lowered to the ground. But it was not to release him.

Still restrained, starting from the tips of his toes, he was being dragged beneath the Witch’s feet—— little-by-little, swallowed into the center of the vortex.

Realizing that she couldn’t obtain his heart, the Witch had decided to consume him instead. A rather short-circuited and overly materialistic idea. There, while everything below his knees was swallowed into the shadow, with his mind tormented by the terror of the gradual loss of sensation, a sudden doubt struck him.

If he was swallowed like this, Subaru would no doubt lose his life.

So in a sense, it might be good to give up here. Embracing death would be his last, half-ditched resistance against the Witch. So maybe it'd be alright if he just let himself be swallowed. But,

—All of his deaths so far had been reversed by the powers of the Witch, but if the Witch herself killed him, would he really be able to come back?

Subaru: “———!”

The moment he realized this, Subaru began his belated resistance. With the lower half of his body already swallowed into the shadow, such efforts were only naive and futile. Yet he had no choice but to try.

Come to think of it, even before the question of whether he could return, he wasn't even sure if being swallowed by the Witch would actually kill him. What if he becomes a part of the Witch after being pulled into that shadow, and ends up spending eternity without being granted the permission to die?

Over that long, long timespan, all his current resolve and determination would whittle away, and then, would he bend to the Witch in the end? Subaru wasn't confident enough to say that he wouldn't. Therefore, he mustn't allow himself to be swallowed.

In the worst case, he would commit suicide by biting off his tongue before he could fall into the Witch's hands— but,

Subaru: “—uu, huh?”

That resolve was prematurely cut off by a scalding sensation on his chest.

Feeling a rising heat burning the left side of his chest, Subaru looked down to see what was happening. And there, he saw a light coming from the heat, seeping through the darkness that was enshrouding his body.

What was even more surprising was that beginning from the source of that light, the Witch's shadow was slowly vanishing as if melting away.

Subaru: “If this...!”

Before his mind could even process what this abrupt burst of light may be, Subaru twisted his body, using the light to slice through the shroud of shadows. The range of his movements widened as he shredded

through the shroud, and, confirming that his arms were free, he immediately reached for the source of that light.

Grasping it between his fingertips, what he retrieved from his chest was a napkin, fluttering in the wind— with a grey cat embroidered on top. It was Petra's handkerchief.

Subaru: "Why would this... Nevermind!!"

Putting off his thoughts for later, Subaru swung his arm with the handkerchief in hand. Obeying Subaru's will, the supposedly soft fabric took on an astounding resilience, and, with the sharpness of a razor it severed the bond between the Witch and the ground.

Witch of Envy: "——"

Subaru: "Woah! If this thing... Alright!!"

Subaru stabbed the handkerchief's blade into the mass of darkness that swallowed the lower half of his body.

Burying the tip of the shining handkerchief into the shade, for a moment, the shadows rushed to envelop the light, but, without a sound, they burst apart in an instant.

With the shadows scattered away, all that remained were Subaru's own two feet landing on the ground. Immediately stumbling backwards, he confirmed that both his legs were still there. Then, readying the handkerchief at his hips, Subaru ran his eyes over the shining piece of cloth.

Petra's embroidered handkerchief. It was hard to imagine that her feelings for Subaru could have such miraculous qualities. But there, Subaru's mind turned to the one who must have done something to this handkerchief.

Subaru: "That Echidna... Did she already know this was going to happen?"

"Just for insurance, insurance", he could almost hear the white-haired Witch saying.

In the dreamworld, at the closing of the tea party, Echidna had taken this handkerchief as her payment. He had never actually considered what would happen if a real-world object was given away in a dream—

But if this was the result of her tampering, then it really is possible to influence reality from within a dream. In any case,

Subaru: “Guess I better say thanks... for giving me something to fight the Witch with.”

Witch of Envy: “———”

Faced with the fact that her shadows had been destroyed, the Witch only stood there, stupefied. Seeing this opening, Subaru drew in a short breath and lunged to the Witch’s side——

Subaru: “Careless to a fault!”

——And thrust the handkerchief towards the frozen Witch’s flank. The Witch didn’t move an inch. But the shadows at her feet shot out in self-defense, activating the protective “dress”, as Garfiel called it.

Subaru: “——AaaaaaaaaaaaaAAAAAARGH!”

Yet it did nothing to stop the handkerchief’s light. Like a sharpened dagger, the handkerchief pierced through the shadowy dress, thrusting straight for the side of the Witch’s face—— And struck true.

Subaru: “Got her——!”

The unmistakable sensation in his hand prompted him to cry out in joy, as Subaru turned, reining the same momentum into another backslash against the Witch——

Subaru: “——Eh?”

But he stopped, when he saw it.

The Witch stood there, unmoving, looking at Subaru. The shining thrust to the side of her face had indeed landed, and had peeled away the vast, shadowy veil, revealing her face.

It was a familiar, silver-haired girl with eyes of frozen emotion staring back at Subaru.

Subaru: “Emilia...?”

She did not respond to his call. But everything else set off into massive motion.

The shadowy shroud returned. The darkness beneath his feet which had been previously eradicated, coiled around Subaru's body once more, and this time, it constricted him without mercy, causing him to shriek.

Starting from the right side of his ribs to the entire left half of his body, the shadow restrained him tightly in its grasp. Only his right arm, still holding onto the handkerchief, could still move, albeit barely, being denied the full range of its motions.

And, just like this, the immobilized Subaru was steadily pulled beneath the sea of shadows. Without a trace of hesitation, it was far faster than the last time. First, was his lower body, and then his left shoulder submerged as well, until only his head and the right portion of his chest were still above ground.

Desperately lifting his head, resisting with his sinking body,

Subaru: "Emilia! Emilia!? Wha— How did this... why!?"

When he saw her missing from the Tomb and the Sanctuary engulfed by shadows, Subaru had thought that she was swallowed by the Witch.

At least then, his resistance against the Witch of Envy up to now would have had some meaning.

—But why was she the one wearing that shadow, attacking the Sanctuary?

He didn't have an answer. Nor would she answer him. She didn't see Subaru at all. A never-before-seen coldness gleamed in her violet eyes, and Subaru couldn't be sure if her consciousness was still there.

There wasn't even enough time to find out.

Subaru: "Gu... Ah..."

His body was dragged deeper and deeper into the shadow.

He couldn't feel a thing in his swallowed body. It wouldn't be so bad if it was only a lack of sensation, but the fact that even the sense of existence was lost forced him to reassess the danger of being swallowed here.

Confirming that the handkerchief was still in his right hand, the only part of his body he could still move, his resolve was settled.

The white-haired Witch flashed across his mind once more.

He would like to amend his previous statement, and instead raise a complaint to that Witch.

Subaru: “Did that bastard Echidna seriously know it’ll turn out like this...?”

If that were the case, he’d be so moved by her scrupulous consideration that his eyes would tear up.

With tears of blood, that is—

—Closing his eyes, when he opened them again, Subaru stabbed the handkerchief into his own throat.

The sharpened point pierced into his flesh, and bore open a hole in the vital regions of his throat. Blood flooded down his windpipe and into his lungs, drowning his consciousness in red.

Suicide. The Witch of Greed had equipped him for precisely this opportunity.

It wasn’t to resist the Witch of Envy. She knew that their conversation in the Citadel would set her off. And here, she exacted her toll.

Witch of Envy: “———!”

Seeing Subaru commit suicide, for the first time, an emotion other than love detonated in the Witch of Envy.

But, drowning in his own blood, Subaru’s already-detached consciousness wasn’t aware of this.

Only, seeing the girl’s familiar face twisted in grief, regardless of what was residing inside her, it still pained his heart all the same to see her like this—

His throat was filled with blood, making it difficult to formulate speech. But even so, Subaru spoke, not to the counterfeit residing in her vessel, but to the girl.

Subaru: “I, will—”

—Definitely save you.

The next instant, Natsuki Subaru died.

The pain of overflowing blood clogging his throat, drowning his lungs from within, and the sense of loss, of his consciousness pulling further and further away— Despite experiencing it countless times, the vividness of death did not fade.

No matter how many times he went through it, death always imparted fresh suffering on Subaru. But even so,

Subaru: “It still beats not coming back... and having everything broken beyond repair.”

Briefly congratulating himself for managing to return after unhesitatingly choosing death, Subaru decided to set it aside for now.

It was still early to tell whether he had actually safely returned or not.

Subaru: “This is no time to be celebrating. Anyway, better sort out what to do next, what needs to be done, and...”

And review his own resolve.

Closing his eyes, Subaru drew in a deep breath. When he opened them again, there was no longer any doubt within, and only what he must do.

Standing up and patting off the dust on his body, he looked around the room and found the girl lying on her side not far away.

It was Emilia. Most likely, the pained expression on her face was due to the past she was presently facing in her Trials. Subaru ran over and reached out his hand to wake her. He would bring her out, meet up with Ram and Otto outside the Tomb, and then figure out what to do after that.

But there, just before his hand could touch her, Subaru noticed that his fingers were shaking.

Subaru: “...What?”

His eyes widened at his trembling fingertips as he held his hand in front of his face. His mind commanded the shaking to stop, but still shaking of their own accord, his fingers ignored his commands. And then, Subaru noticed it.

His teeth were clattering as well, unable to close.

Subaru: “Hands and teeth are shaking... What is this...”

Although surprised by his body’s anomaly, deep down, Subaru knew why it was happening.

The cause was none other than the image that flashed across his mind the moment he was about to touch her.

—Of Emilia’s frozen, emotionless face gazing down at him on the verge of his death.

Surely, the Witch of Envy paid a visit to the Sanctuary, and, for whatever reason, enshrouded Emilia’s body within its shadow. In his final moments, Subaru had seen this with his own eyes.

Most likely, the Witch had possessed Emilia’s body while she lay unconscious in the Tomb.

Subaru had seen Petelgeuse’s ability to possess other people’s bodies, so it wasn’t hard to accept that possibility.

Besides, the reason the Witch chose Emilia’s body was simple.

Subaru had revealed too much forbidden information at the tea party. Though the Witch manifested to punish him, she was barred from setting foot in that place. So instead, she turned her attention to the unconscious Emilia at Subaru’s side.

Then the Witch took over her body, covered the Sanctuary in shadow, killed Garfiel, and swallowed Subaru— And that should just about sum up the events of the previous loop.

Subaru: “Knowing all that... Why is my body still shaking...?”

Even though he could calmly recall the facts of what happened, his feeble heart could not forget the terror of being faced with that abomination.

If Subaru’s speculation was correct, then the root of that disaster was certainly the tea party he was invited to after Returning by Death. Which means, since he didn’t attend the tea party this time, he didn’t step on that landmine.

—So he was 90% sure that the Witch wasn't currently inside Emilia.

The fact that Subaru's body was still instinctively voicing its objection was basically due to cowardice.

But still, he couldn't rule out the worst-case scenario.

That is— would the Witch of Envy really give up her pursuit just because he passed through Return by Death?

Subaru: "——"

It was the Witch of Envy who allowed Subaru to Return by Death in the first place.

Subaru himself had come to this conclusion and Echidna had affirmed it. The Witch's appearances in the past and the ending of the previous loop should have pushed it beyond reasonable doubt. For whatever reason, the Witch didn't want Subaru's death to be the end. For that, he was grateful. And only for that.

The question was, would such an obsessively envious, overwhelmingly powerful Witch, obstinate to the point of intruding into reality, really let Subaru go?

Subaru: "——"

If the Witch of Envy had the ability to rewind time, then it'd be far too optimistic to think that she would let Subaru use it without being able to use it herself.

If Subaru could rewind the world through death, then how could he know that the Witch wouldn't turn back time to pursue him?

His cowering heart couldn't answer that question— Though the answer was right in front of him.

Subaru: "..."

Everything would be clear if he just touched Emilia and woke her from her Trials.

If she woke up, and called Subaru's name in her usual voice like the ringing of a silver chime, Subaru would be freed from these grips of fear.

But what if that was not the case?

Subaru: "...It'll be all over, then."

If the Witch shows up every time he returns, then there will truly be nothing he can do. The Witch of Envy's power was absolute, and he could not envision a scenario where they could prevail against a being with the power to plunge the Sanctuary into shadow.

Against a nightmare that so effortlessly sent Garfiel to his grave, what countermeasures could there possibly be?

In other words, this was a watershed.

Subaru: "First I wasn't sure if I'd return after death... Now I can't be sure that Emilia is really Emilia? What am I... an idiot?"

Taking hold of his situation once again, Subaru let out a small sigh.

The shaking of his fingers and the clattering of his teeth vanished. Returning to his senses, he realized it.

All this vague, indeterminate uncertainty—

Subaru: "It's just the same thing that happens to anyone, isn't it?"

Not knowing the future, worrying about what will happen in the next second, are all just natural facts of life.

Even if there is the small possibility of foreseeing what's to come, what's there to be afraid of? Such idiotic fear would be equivalent to being afraid of life itself,

Emilia: "...Oh, no..."

Compared to the girl being crushed by her past right before his eyes, how petty and ludicrous his hesitation seemed to be.

Subaru: "—Emilia."

Calling her name, Subaru touched the girl's cheeks with the tips of his no longer trembling fingers.

White and fair. The smooth touch of her skin transferred a warmth enough to dissolve the flesh of his fingertips. There was a small tremor in her closed eyelids as her long lashes moved, and underneath them, a faint light glimmered from her violet eyes.

Pulled back to reality, Emilia blinked several times and noticed Subaru in front of her,

Emilia: "...Suba... ru?"

Her trembling irises caught onto Subaru, and as he came into focus, she called out his name.

Her voice, her bearing, and the color of her eyes, all belonged to the Emilia he knew.

Subaru: "—Yeah, it's me."

All the shadows of doubt weighing on him, tangling over his body, vanished in a single motion.

Finally hearing her reply, Subaru let out a long, long sigh, and, propping her up with his hand behind her back, he felt his body drained of strength.

In contrast, Emilia righted herself and quickly looked over her surroundings. After confirming where she was, perhaps because her head was still a little heavy, Emilia held her hand against her head, and whispered, "So...",

Emilia: "Just now... I was..."

Confused by the pain she was feeling, Emilia closed her eyes and tried to recall her memories from before she fell asleep— and what happened while she was sleeping.

As the memories flooded back, Emilia opened her eyes and turned to Subaru with her quivering, peach-colored lips.

Waves of emotion churned in her violet pupils. Her mind was probably in turmoil over the reminders of her past. But Subaru already knew that Emilia would fall to pieces after waking from her Trials. That was why he could so calmly watch her when she was on the brink of falling apart.

All that was left was to gently hold her, trembling in his arms, and find words to console her and tell her that it was alright—

Emilia: "...Subaru?"

But just as Subaru was about to do this, Emilia reacted in a way completely different from what he had imagined.

Her unsettled eyes had calmed, and her quivering lips were stilled by an even more powerful emotion. Then, Emilia softly extended her hand towards Subaru,

Emilia: "Why... do you look like you're about to cry?"

Subaru: "...Eh?"

Emilia's fingertips brushed against Subaru's forehead and made their way to the side of his widened eyes. The pale-white finger softly brushing the corner of his eye caught a drop of tear on the verge of falling. And only then, did Subaru realize that he was close to crying.

But there was no time to ask himself why.

Subaru: "Ah... Uh... Eh?"

A tremor came without warning.

An uncontrollable tremor of a different dimension than the shudders of his fingers and teeth.

His whole body was shaking, robbing him of all the strength inside him. Kneeling at Emilia's side, Subaru could only curl up, hugging his own trembling body.

Then his grips began to loosen when he understood why.

If the tremor he felt before he touched Emilia was because he was afraid that she might have been replaced by the Witch—

Emilia: "It's alright, Subaru. It's alright, it'll be alright. Because I'm right here with you—"

Saying this, Emilia embraced Subaru's trembling body from the side.

Through the thin fabric of their clothing, they could feel each other's warmth. The quiet heartbeat, and the warmth transferred from her body filled his heart to the brim.

—When the fear of that possibility passed, when he knew that possibility was gone, Subaru was overwhelmed by the sense of relief.

Even though his heart wanted him to be strong, his body wouldn't obey at all.

After all, he had neither a heart of steel nor a body with the strength to protect it.

Feeling Emilia's warmth, her heartbeat, and her gentle embrace, no matter how much he despised his pathetic weakness, he couldn't help but feel relieved.

Quietly, quietly, quietly, the two went on holding each other inside the Tomb.

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Emilia: "Calmed down now?"

Subaru: "Ah, y—yeah... Um, sorry. Don't know what's gotten into me."

Their embrace went on until Subaru stopped trembling.

Emilia's question at the end made Subaru apologize with his face all red. Hearing this, Emilia shook her head with "That's ok",

Emilia: "It's good. Recently I've been feeling like I'm always relying on Subaru. If you show me your weak side once in a while too... I'll feel a little more relieved."

Subaru: "I got no counter to that... but I'd rather not show this side to Emilia if I can help it."

Emilia: "Why's that?"

Subaru: "Because I only want Emilia-tan to see my strong and flashy side. I don't want you to know what a weak, pathetic, hopeless guy I actually am."

Emilia: "Even if I see a little of Subaru's weak side, I won't think of you like that, you know?"

Emilia's words were gentle, but Subaru's pride did not allow him to accept them.

“She’s not like that”, or “she’ll be disappointed to see that kind of weakness” weren’t at the heart of the problem. It was simply Subaru’s— A boy’s matter.

Subaru: “Not hiding their weaknesses, always exposing their true selves to others... I’m not too fond of those tear-jerking types.”

Emilia: “Tear-jerking... types?”

Subaru: “It’s a thing from back home. So I only want to show Emilia-tan my strong side. That’s a man’s conviction, you know.”

As the pointless topic swept away the awkwardness from moments ago, Subaru smiled wryly at Emilia, who was tilting her head. But soon, his expression became rigid once more,

Subaru: “So then... I wanted to ask about the Trials...”

Emilia: “—Ok.”

Hearing Subaru’s timid question, Emilia paused a beat before nodding in reply.

Seeing her reaction, for a moment, Subaru was almost caught off-guard. Because her reaction to the word “Trials” was different from all the times before.

Most likely, it was because, after waking up, just when she was about to be stricken by the impact of having failed the Trials— Subaru’s unintentionally pathetic sideshow got in the way.

Their embrace was brief, but it had given Emilia time to recover from the shock of her failure. That was probably part of the reason why she could remain so calm right now.

Subaru: “Never thought being a wimp would come in handy...”

Emilia: “But, Subaru, why are you here? I thought I was the only one who could come in here...”

Subaru: “No, I...”

Before he could give her the honest answer, Subaru cut himself off. And then, he began to think— Just what would be the right answer here?

Truth is, he could easily tell her that he received the Qualification and passed the Trials. But Subaru got the feeling that if he did this, Emilia would only blame herself for failing the Trials and feel a sense of inferiority towards him.

Then inferiority would turn into anxiety, and Emilia would be trapped between the pain of guilt and self-loathing. If that happens, her present ability to remain calm would all mean nothing.

If there was a chance for Emilia to face the Trials in a different way, then Subaru should respect that possibility.

Although, whether Emilia could overcome her past in the end was a different question.

—It's worth a try, Subaru decided.

Subaru: "I got worried when Emilia-tan didn't come out and couldn't help it. At first, I managed to stay conscious... But once I got here, it was like what happened during the day all over again."

Emilia: "I see... Sorry I made you worry."

Subaru: "Nah, actually, come to think of it, I plopped right down after I ran in as well, so I guess the people outside must be worried to death right now."

Not hearing a peep after watching Subaru run inside must be making the others just as anxious. Realizing this, Emilia turned up her face with an "Ah",

Emilia: "A—anyway if we don't get back to everyone soon... they'll get really worried about Subaru too, right?"

Subaru: "My life or death or whatever doesn't matter that much, but we better get the message out that Emilia-tan's safe otherwise some bad things could happen."

Emilia: "...How could you say that."

Hearing Subaru's exaggeration, Emilia shot him a reproachful gaze. Being looked at like that, Subaru said "Sorry", lightly shrugging, as the two of them began walking out of the Tomb.

On the way, Subaru continued, "So then",

Subaru: "Can you tell me about it? The, um, about the Trials."

Emilia: "...Sorry. I... seem to have failed it."

Subaru: "Is that right... Hm, guess I kinda figured it out from your reaction."

Emilia looked away, apologizing, and, seeing her like this, Subaru pretended to have just found out. Although it stuck him with pangs of guilt, he only shook his head and stifled back his indecision,

Subaru: "So does that mean... It's over now?"

Emilia: "I don't think we can say that yet... You're allowed to challenge as many times as you want. I don't know why, but I just know that. Well..."

Echidna had explicitly revealed the nature of the Trials. But while Subaru already knew this, Emilia seemed to only be subconsciously aware of it.

Emilia's words trailed off towards the end, and, after a brief hesitation,

Emilia: "Nevermind, it's nothing. I guess it's done for today, I'll try again tomorrow."

Subaru: "Are you sure? If it's too much, it'll be alright to wait a few days... That way we can find more patterns and countermeasures to raise our chances."

Emilia: "Thank you... But, I know that won't solve the problem. I know it won't."

Subaru: "...You might feel better if you talk about it... Not that I actually know what I'm talking about."

He took a glance at Emilia as he spoke and saw her lift up her eyes to meet his gaze, with her lips quivering. But just as her tangled emotions were on the brink of pouring out, Emilia closed her eyes, as if abandoning the idea,

Emilia: "—I'm sorry. I... can't let Subaru see what I'm feeling right now."

Subaru: "No matter which part of Emilia-tan I see, I'll never dislike Emilia-tan because of it, you know."

Emilia: "It's not that I'm afraid of what Subaru will think. No, maybe a little... But I'm afraid of something more than that."

Emilia became silent. But even so, Subaru could see that the strength within her violet pupils had not wavered, confirming that his prodding was successful.

As long as he keeps supporting her like this, Emilia will eventually give in and reveal her weakness to him. But those were not the kinds of thoughts he should be thinking.

Acting like he knows everything, playing Emilia's heart in the palm of his hand, such a revolting nature made him want to vomit— Even though, knowing that it was necessary, there shouldn't be any reason to feel this way.

???: “—Emilia-sama!”

Pressing down his self-loathing as he continued his steps forward, what pulled him back to reality was the dazzling light of the moon, along with a voice calling to the girl beside him.

The pale-blue moonlight shining into the Tomb's entrance, accompanied by a cool, refreshing wind, greeted them as they stepped out of the Tomb. Looking down, he could see relieved expressions appearing on the faces of the party waiting for Emilia's return.

It looked like the first to call out to Emilia was Ram. After confirming that Emilia was safe, Ram breathed a rare sigh of relief before turning to Subaru, standing beside Emilia,

Ram: “And Barusu, good work.”

Subaru: “Oooooohh... I didn't expect you to say something nice like that, I'm surprised. What's with the admirable attitude, it's not like you at all?”

Ram: “If you occasionally perform a good task, I will compliment you like this. At least you brought Emilia-sama back safely, so I will give you the appropriate evaluation. Roswaal-sama would be pleased too.”

Although being able to report to her master seemed to be her primary reason for feeling relieved, it was still a fresh new joy for Subaru to receive such a straightforward compliment from her. While smiling like an idiot, Subaru nonchalantly drifted his gaze to the person next to Ram— the golden-haired youth among the welcoming party, standing a bit farther away.

Garfiel, who had been leaning against the trunk of a tree, uncrossed his arms and walked over with leisurely steps. Subaru couldn't sense anything suspicious about his attitude or movements, but then again, Garfiel could close their distance in an instant if he wanted to.

Coming out of the Tomb after Returning by Death twice in a row, there was more than enough reason to be worried. Although he couldn't gauge the current strength of his own stench, just the thought of it made Subaru put up his maximum caution.

Then, when Garfiel arrived in front of the stiffened Subaru, the first thing out of his mouth was,

Garfiel: "Was wonderin' what'd happen when y'ran in like an idiot there. Good t'see y'back safe. All that time I was thinkin' «Gafugaron nuts don't fall from winds», but sure kept me on edge."

Subaru: "Ow! Oy, st—, ow! Hurts!"

Saying that with a smile, Garfiel violently and repeatedly slapped Subaru on his shoulder.

Under those bone-numbing impacts, for a moment, Subaru thought "Is Garfiel attempting an accidental assassination!?", but seeing the way he was flashing his teeth smiling, Subaru just couldn't sense that kind of malice from him.

It really just looked like he was welcoming their safe return. Facing yet another unexpected reaction, Subaru couldn't hide his disbelief any longer,

Subaru: "That's... it?"

Garfiel: "Hah? What. Y'want me t'pat ya on the head for a job well done as well?"

Subaru: "If it's Emilia then it's one thing, but who'd want to be patted by you? No, I mean..."

Subaru was just about to ask why everything was turned on its head, but stopped himself when he realized that there was no need to poke the bear on purpose. Regardless of what Garfiel's true feelings were, it was fortunate he wasn't in the mood to attack on sight.

In any case, Subaru was starting to get an idea of which conditions make Garfiel bare his fangs. If he could just sidestep the worst conditions that make Garfiel turn hostile no-questions-asked, he should be fine.

Subaru: “You know, it’s kind of a headache trying to decide how to deal with you.”

Garfiel: “The hell’s that supposed to mean, oy?”

Subaru: “It’s a thing from back home. Anyways, let’s get back before going into the details. I want to let Emilia get some rest first. We can discuss the plan after that as well.”

No one objected to Subaru’s proposal.

Emilia apologized to everyone with “I’m sorry”, then Ram took her by the hand and led the party back towards the Sanctuary— Opting to settle down in Ryuzu’s house once again.

Emilia didn’t fall to pieces. And Garfiel remained friendly despite Subaru’s Return by Death.

Facing conditions entirely different from before, Subaru’s mind scrambled to find of the best course of action, as well as how best to approach death from here on.

There were too many things he needed to know, too many he needed to test.

Just how many sacrifices will he have to make in order to grasp the best possible future in the end?

Setting about his calculations, Subaru didn’t notice how he neglected to enter his own life into the equation.

Ryuzu: “———”

Nor did he notice the way Ryuzu was staring at him from behind.

And walked on without ever noticing.

Arc 4 Chapter 53 - Mounting Questions

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 12, Chapter 1 “I’ve Already Seen Hell”, Part 2 (heavily changed)

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken – [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#)

After leaving the Tomb and returning to the Sanctuary, their discussion continued in Ryuzu’s house.

In terms of content, there was almost no difference from the previous loops— Emilia announced that she had failed her Trials and that she intended to keep trying. Beyond that, Emilia didn’t give any more details, and, noticing this, Ram dismissed the meeting on account of Emilia’s health.

Going through the night’s events in their minds, they each left for their respective lodgings, until the only ones left in the room were Emilia, Subaru, and Ram.

Ram: “Ram will now help Emilia-sama retire for the night, but it seems Barusu hasn’t realized that he’s overstayed his welcome.”

Subaru: “Thanks for the non-roundabout way of telling me. Considering Emilia’s condition, I guess I should leave you to it... But, I just want to have a minute. Can I be alone with Emilia for a bit?”

Ram: “Disgraceful.”

Subaru: “You’re the one who immediately thought of it like that!”

He vehemently objected to Ram’s look of disdain, but the pink-haired maid only pretended not to hear anything. Then, she looked to Emilia, who was sitting on the bed,

Ram: “What do you think, Emilia-sama? If you do not wish to hear Barusu’s rubbish, Ram will dispose of him straight away.”

Subaru: “What do you know? How can the gentle, kind-hearted Emilia-tan possibly reject me, right?”

Emilia: “I’m reeeeaally tired tonight, if Subaru wants to chat about all sorts of voluminous topics like usual, then we’d better not...”

Subaru: “Haven’t heard anyone say voluminous in a while... Besides, I’m not in the mood for that either. I’ll leave seducing Emilia-tan for another time. I just wanted to talk about the Tomb for a bit.”

Despite this usual exchange between them, Emilia still looked uneasy. But, hearing Subaru bring up the topic of the Trials, Emilia closed her eyes for a moment before turning her violet pupils to Ram with “Sorry”, signaling her to leave the room.

Silently obeying her instruction, Ram bowed and headed for the door. And as she passed by Subaru’s side, she quietly whispered—

Ram: “Please refrain from any topics that might overburden Emilia-sama.”

—Issuing this severe command lest he should forget.

With the sound of the bedroom door closing, only Subaru and Emilia were left in the room.

On the bed, Emilia looked up at Subaru with an earnest gaze in her eyes, and Subaru lightly shrugged,

Subaru: “I barely had a chance to check while inside the Tomb, but are you really feeling alright? Considering the way I found you, I’m still really worried.”

Emilia: “It’s alright. Mhm, thanks. But really, I don’t feel anything strange with my body or mind. Besides, if there’s anything to worry about, I should be more worried about Subaru, you know?”

Subaru: “W—why’s that?”

Emilia: “There’s no «w—why» anything. Subaru... even though I’m glad you came to find me in the Tomb when I didn’t come back, something also happened to you in there, right? Ram said it had been almost thirty minutes after you went in when you came out with me again.”

In front of Emilia’s reproachful gaze, Subaru poked out his tongue in his mind.

Despite trying to throw her off the scent inside the Tomb, it seemed that Emilia still noticed something was off from Ram's superfluous remarks— Imagining what might have happened over the unaccounted timespan from when he entered the Tomb to when they came out again, Emilia's face stiffened.

Naturally, the events of the Trials resurfaced in her mind.

For the First Trial, she had to face her own past, and in the initial loop, just the thought that Subaru might know what happened within that Trials distressed Emilia to no end.

Even though she had remained calm in this loop so far, it wouldn't be hard to imagine that she'd lose her current composure when she reaches that same conclusion. So,

Emilia: "Subaru, could it be... Subaru took the Trials as well...?"

Subaru: "Nono, nothing like that. I mean, it's not like they'd let anyone take the Trials. Besides, I was only in there for so long because I was trying to wake Emilia up."

Emilia: "Because of me?"

Subaru: "Yeah. It looked like you were having a nightmare, so I was frantically trying to wake you up, but you were sound asleep, like you were trapped inside the dream. I thought about carrying you out just like that, but I got a feeling that something crazy bad might happen if I did."

He said, with exaggerated movements to cover his deception.

Emilia didn't say anything to refute him. Naturally, she had no way to verify whether he was telling the truth. Since Subaru said so, even if she had doubts in her mind, there was no way to prove them.

Emilia: "I... see. Sorry, for having that weird thought."

Subaru: "No, don't be. Although, if only I could take the Trials too, maybe I'd be able to be at Emilia's side and we could beat the Trials together."

Emilia: "...I don't know. Subaru and I might not see the same things..."

Emilia's words grew weak towards the end, but she didn't probe any further into Subaru's lies.

She didn't want anyone to know the truth of the past she failed to overcome, and her mental state probably made her want to believe Subaru when he claimed to know nothing about its contents.

Even now, Subaru was playing Emilia's heart in the palm of his hand.

Emilia: "So then, what was it that you wanted to talk about? That wasn't the main subject just now, right?"

Subaru: "Yeah. That wasn't the main subject. There's something else I wanted to ask."

Emilia: "Something you wanted to ask?"

Emilia tilted her head.

Watching the cascade of silver hair falling from her shoulders, Subaru went on, "Yeah, something I wanted to ask",

Subaru: "Lately, I haven't seen Puck around... Is he still not responding?"

Emilia: "Uh, mm... Yeah. Puck still hasn't responded. I keep calling him, but it's like he's asleep inside the crystal."

Suddenly hearing that name brought up, Emilia cast down her eyes and answered.

Her white fingers reached to her chest, and grasped onto the green, beautifully glistening crystal. But the crystal that housed the Great Spirit Puck seemed to have all but lost its radiance.

Subaru: "...Any idea why?"

Emilia: "Even though there were times like this before when my calls couldn't reach him, he'd always be back after two or three days. But this time it's been almost a week... I'm starting to get worried too."

It was the same little grey cat who once proclaimed that it would protect Emilia.

As that tiny figure emerged in Subaru's mind, his thoughts turned to the calamities that befell the Sanctuary, and to Emilia, caught up within it.

When the so-called Great Rabbit attacked the Sanctuary, most likely, everyone inside became its food— That was what Subaru imagined, at least.

Garfiel, Ram, Roswaal and the others would have all been among the victims. And naturally, Emilia would have been one of them.

The sensation of being shredded, devoured, having their own existence become slivers of meat in another organism's belly— The thought of what Emilia and the others must have experienced filled Subaru's lungs with boiling rage and grief.

But, setting this fury aside, Subaru's thoughts landed on the useless Spirit who sat idly by while harm was allowed to come to Emilia.

It was the same in the last loop when Emilia's body was possessed by the Witch.

The flood of shadows was covering over all the world, and Emilia was wrapped in that eerie shroud. Her body was taken over by the Witch's will while the tall-talking Great Spirit did nothing.

All talk and no action, hollow words in the extreme.

Subaru: "All this time, the only big contributions from that guy were the fight with Elsa and those Sapporo Snow Festivals I got caught up in... Can't help but think that he's totally unreliable at this point."

While holding his chin, showering complaints about Puck, Subaru forced his mind to think.

Calamities were about to befall the Sanctuary, which meant that Emilia would be in danger. Since Garfiel and Roswaal could not repel them, Subaru would have to find something to even the odds, and Puck was precisely what he needed.

Subaru: "You don't happen to know any other way to reach Puck, do you? If he's here, all sorts of topics could suddenly move forward."

Emilia: "———I don't... know of any... I think."

Subaru didn't expect much from this question, and Emilia gave the expected reply. It was just that there was something about the brief moment of hesitation before her answer that tugged at Subaru. But, before he could ask about it,

Emilia: “Was there something you wanted to ask Puck?”

Subaru: “Hm? Ah, yeah, since it’s a Witch’s Tomb, and it’s been there for over 400 years, I figured we should ask a guy who was around back then. Maybe we could make a few breakthroughs that way.”

Hearing Subaru’s prepared excuse, Emilia nodded in agreement. Then, as if earnestly considering his proposal,

Emilia: “That’s... right. Puck might, just know something... Mm, I got it. I’ll try even harder than usual to call him.”

Subaru: “Ho-kay. I’ll look forward to Emilia-tan’s success, then.”

Emilia was determined to beat the Trials. She was unaware that Subaru had taken the Trials as well. And, so far, her motivation hadn’t waned.

Puck was still holed up in his crystal, unwilling to come out, so probably couldn’t be expected to make an appearance in this loop. Considering how he wouldn’t offer any help to make things easier for Subaru, and how they left things at the end of their last conversation, Subaru’s opinion of Puck was only continuously worsening.

Subaru: “Well, I shouldn’t stay too long. Ram will get some weird suspicions and that’ll give her even more reasons to bully me, so I better get going. Although, if Emilia-tan wants someone to sleep with, I wouldn’t mind...”

Emilia: “I don’t want someone to sleep with though?”

Subaru: “Oooof. So straightforward... Got nothing to say to that...”

Giving the confused-looking Emilia a wry smile, Subaru headed for the door.

In any case, this was as far as their conversation would go tonight. He had no way to delve any deeper into Emilia’s personal problems right now.

All Subaru could do was create an environment where Emilia could focus on her Trials while he would try to break through the dire circumstances surrounding them.

Emilia will challenge the Tomb, and Subaru will challenge the Sanctuary. Meanwhile, he mustn't let Emilia know of his efforts behind the scenes. To her, that would only be another burden.

Subaru: "Well, good night, Emilia-tan. If you get nightmares, you're always welcome to come fleeing to my side."

Emilia: "If I go all the way to bother Subaru, the villagers will be pretty shocked, right?... Hey, Subaru."

Subaru: "Hm?"

Just as he was about to leave with that joke, he was stopped by Emilia's call.

Turning around with his hand on the door, he saw that Emilia's lips were trembling and there was hesitation in her eyes,

Emilia: "No, it's nothing. Good night. Stay safe."

Subaru: "No kidding about that last part... G'night."

With a wave of his hand, Subaru burned Emilia's smile into his mind as he left the room.

Closing the bedroom door behind him, Subaru looked up and saw Ram sitting in a chair in the adjacent living room, sipping from a cup of steaming black tea. Even though the house was vacated out of its owner Ryuzu's hospitality, that didn't seem to deter the maid from her usual insolence. Seeing this, Subaru let out a wry smile.

Subaru: "I should say sorry to have kept you waiting... But, seeing your lackadaisical attitude, I kinda don't want to anymore."

Ram: "Ram was rather expecting some sort of compliment for not touching the sweets— You didn't do anything improper to Emilia-sama, I hope?"

Subaru: "You know I always put Emilia above everything else, so what kind of question is that? You're the one who should be careful not to give Emilia anything weird to worry about... Although I guess I can trust you there."

Her attitude towards Subaru was definitely different from her attitude towards Emilia.

Ram's conduct could be considered vicious depending on who you ask, but it was precisely because of her refreshingly blatant discrimination that Subaru deemed her worthy of trust.

Hearing Subaru's snortle, Ram finished the remaining contents of her cup and stood up. Then, watching her walk towards the bedroom,

Subaru: "By the way, you got a minute?"

Ram: "Disgraceful."

Subaru: "What kind of indiscriminate beast do you think I am!?"

Hugging her own body, Ram quickly placed some distance between herself and Subaru. Naturally, Subaru knew that she wasn't being serious, but, deep down, it still hurt to see a girl react like this.

Subaru: "Don't know why I have to say this, but I've never looked at you in any sexy kind of way, you know."

Ram: "The fact that you said it with such bestial lust has completely destroyed your credibility. Besides, I've been sensing something strange in Barusu's gaze ever since you arrived in the Sanctuary."

Subaru: "What's that supposed to mean? That kind of baseless accusation is totally unheard of, you know! You sure you're not just being overly self-conscious?"

Ram: "You are unaware of it, then. Somehow, your gaze seems to be strange and distant whenever you look at me. I don't know who, but it's as if you're looking at someone else through Ram."

—What she said was true, and that Subaru himself had failed to realize it only made it all the more shocking.

As if having just taken a blow to the head, Subaru could sense his thoughts freeze still. His face stiffened and his eyes swam. But, resenting the fact that he was reacting this way, he quickly recovered himself and shrugged,

Subaru: "I—I have no idea what you're talking about."

Ram: "It really is strange that you'd only realize it after I pointed it out. But that gaze wasn't entirely unpleasant... That's why I didn't say anything until now."

Watching the shaken Subaru, Ram softly sighed.

Her attitude was different from the way she was always teasing him, almost like she was being considerate of his pain.

Their appearances were nearly identical, but inside, they were completely different. Even though he should have known this, whenever Ram behaves so gently towards him, it'd almost feel as though she and the sleeping girl were beginning to overlap.

What Ram pointed out was true. She wasn't mistaken. Through Ram, Subaru was seeing the girl who looked almost exactly like her. And he couldn't help it.

It was also Ram who made him realize this.

Ram: "...So, was there something you wanted to ask me?"

Subaru: "Ugh?"

Ram: "It wasn't my intention to depress Barusu. In fact, making Barusu depressed is quite low on my priorities list. Right now, Ram intends to wait on Emilia-sama and return to Roswaal-sama's side. So if you don't start talking, you wouldn't mind if I start ignoring you?"

Subaru: "No wait... Uuh, right. I wanted to ask about Garfiel."

Imposing on Ram's rare display of patience, Subaru wrenched out the question he had wanted to ask.

Hearing this, Ram's brows lifted in surprise, breaking her apathetic expression,

Ram: "Did something happen between you and Garf?"

Subaru: "Nothing yet, but can't guarantee what might happen later on. I'll have a lot more opportunities to run into that guy, and you seem to have known him for a while, so I figured I should try asking you."

Ram: "Is that so... Well, I'll take your word for it."

Saying this as if having seen through Subaru's mind, Ram touched her hand to her chin.

Ram: "So, what did you want to ask about Garf?"

Subaru: "Well, I already know that guy's ridiculously overpowered, but, uh... What do you think will get Garfiel to leave the Sanctuary?"

Ram: "...That's, certainly a strange question."

Subaru: "I figured there's no point beating around the bush here. Guess it doesn't matter whether you think I'm strange or not at this point."

Unlike Emilia, whom he wanted to hide his underhanded dealings from, it'd be alright if Ram was let in on some of his secret activities. In fact, whether it was the upcoming release of the refugees or the inevitable events that will be unfolding outside the Sanctuary, it would be more convenient if Ram knew about them beforehand.

Ram: "I don't know what you're plotting, and I'm not interested, but if you want to get Garfiel out of the Sanctuary... Well, it's not entirely impossible if Ram implored him."

Subaru: "Love's his weak spot, huh. I thought of it too, but it's kinda hard to say the words."

No doubt Ram would be far more persuasive than Subaru if she was the one to raise the issue with Garfiel. But then Subaru remembered what happened after Garfiel morphed into a giant tiger to chase him as he tried to leave.

There, Garfiel even turned his claws on Ram, the person he supposedly loved, just so he could continue hunting Subaru. Ultimately, the Sanctuary was more important to him than Ram.

Subaru: "But, Ram... That's probably..."

Ram: "Right. It's probably useless."

While Subaru was agonizing over how to respond without sounding like he already knew, Ram casually affirmed his thoughts.

Seeing Subaru's eyes widen, Ram brushed her hand through her peach-colored hair,

Ram: "While Garf is certainly enraptured by Ram, he has already decided on the priorities in his heart. Just like what Roswaal-sama is to Ram."

Subaru: "So there's something else even more important to Garfiel...? Do you know what that is?"

Ram: "I know. But I won't tell you."

Suddenly averting her eyes, Ram did not answer his question. Subaru continued staring at her, as if requesting that she answer him, but, unfazed, Ram only sighed,

Ram: "It is certainly conceited to want to one-sidedly surmise the heart of another. Garfiel's heart belongs to Garfiel. If you wish to know, you can ask him directly."

Subaru: "Hey which one of us is the living definition of conceited here...? And did you know about Roswaal's book?"

Ram: "...Where did you hear about that?"

Just like this, they traded blows, tit-for-tat.

Although he knew that Ram was right, Subaru's rebellious essence still pushed him to object. Ram reacted fiercely to this unexpected question, narrowing her eyes as if to pierce through Subaru with her gaze,

Ram: "Depending on what you say next, I may soon need to hurt you."

Subaru: "And that would be disobeying Roswaal's wishes, wouldn't it? Drop the act, Ram. You can't do anything of the sort."

At least, Ram had never harmed Subaru since they arrived in the Sanctuary. Not only that, one time she had even proclaimed her intention to help him without Roswaal's express orders.

It was with this in mind that Subaru provoked her, having seen through the fact that she would not physically attack him. Hearing this, Ram's expression darkened,

Ram: "Your eyes have become sickening, Barusu."

Subaru: "Huh?"

Ram: “I don’t know what you saw in the Tomb, but it mustn’t have been anything good. This current Barusu is so sickening that I have no desire to speak to you anymore.”

Subaru: “...What I saw in the Tomb... was a kind of hope for me. Don’t just go labeling it as nothing good.”

Recalling his encounter with the white-haired Witch— Echidna, Subaru curled his lips at Ram’s implicit rejection of their meeting.

Although his discussion with Echidna had led to the tragedy of the previous loop, Subaru nonetheless believed that he had received more than what he had paid. Just having someone he could confess Return by Death to was already plenty enough compensation.

Subaru: “———”

For a moment, Subaru and Ram’s eyes met.

Just what could be residing within the depths of those faintly wavering eyes? Subaru strained his awareness to see it, but, before the image could take shape, it dispersed as she looked away.

Ram: “You should leave now. It wouldn’t do to make Emilia-sama wait much longer.”

Subaru: “...Sorry to have kept you. I know... that what you’ve said wasn’t wrong.”

At last, he apologized for his brashness, and Ram, accepting his apology, turned away and headed for the bedroom. Watching her maid’s dress disappear behind the closing door, Subaru exhaled a long, deep sigh, and left Ryuzu’s house.

The breeze sweeping through the Sanctuary brushed against Subaru’s hair as he came out of the building. Breathing in the scent of grass carried in the night’s wind, Subaru stepped out into the night-befallen Sanctuary and headed for his bed in the cathedral.

Walking across the grass, and following along the trail by the light of the moon, Subaru began to think on how he should make use of his time in this loop.

Having been assured that there is no limit to Return by Death, Subaru was now able to do something he had never done before— That is, to sacrifice an entire loop solely for the purpose of gathering information.

Since he was already determined to throw in his life, there would be no other, more efficient way to take advantage of Return by Death.

Subaru: “If I just try something different each loop, the solutions to all the obstacles are bound to start appearing one-by-one...”

And then, all he would need to do would be to link them together and fulfill them all in a single loop.

To break through the obstacles that stand in his way, and beautifully hold onto everyone’s futures—that would be his perfect victory.

Although, just who would be included in that perfect victory was something to consider in and of itself.

Subaru: “———”

Suddenly, Subaru stopped——

——when he smelled something in the wind other than the grass beneath his feet.

Subaru looked up. And in front of his field of vision, was a youth standing in the middle of the star-lit path.

With his arms crossed and his spiky golden hair fluttering in the wind, Garfiel gave his fangs a click.

Subaru: “You sure are a timely bastard.”

Garfiel: “What’s that, y’don’t seem surprised t’ssee me. Well, that’s kinda odd, but does help move th’conversation along.”

Just after he was talking about him with Ram, Garfiel showed up here. Subaru couldn’t help but scratch his cheeks and remark on the timing.

Then, Garfiel gestured with his head, as if signaling something to Subaru. The small figure took a few steps, went off the path, and headed towards the forest.

Watching the figure go further and further away, venturing into the thick undergrowth of the forest, Subaru did a light stretch and turned to the cathedral——

Garfiel: “Wasn’t I tellin ya t’follow me with that nudge just now!? Oy!!”

Garfiel came running over shouting abuse at Subaru, who was trying to walk away, and Subaru held up his arms and shrugged,

Subaru: “Just a little joke. I didn’t miss the point, don’t worry.”

Garfiel: “Kinda pissin’ me off here. Y’keep up or I eat ya.”

Subaru: “Normally, wouldn’t saying something like «I won’t eat ya» have a more calming effect here?”

Roughly swinging out his strides again, Garfiel didn’t respond to Subaru’s comment. Subaru had a bad feeling about how Garfiel sounded like he wanted to say something but didn’t, but all there was to do now was to follow in small quick steps behind him.

Leaving the main road and entering the forest, after walking a short distance, Garfiel snorted.

They’ve arrived in a small clearing amidst the rows of trees, about the size of a round table enough to seat 4 or 5 people. There, Garfiel turned around,

Garfiel: “So... Th’hell did y’bastard see in th’Tomb?”

Subaru: “...You too?”

After Emilia and Ram, he was the third person to ask him that.

Unlike with the previous two, Subaru would have to be cautious what answer he gives to Garfiel, since he probably wouldn’t give up asking until he’s gotten to the bottom of it.

Not minding the thoughts going through Subaru’s head, Garfiel spat out “Me too, huh?”, and clicked his fangs, as his golden irises narrowed into slits,

Garfiel: “I don’t know who said what t’ya where, but I ain’t gettin’ ignored so easily. «Suspicious Berube extends th’same t’his family», as they say.”

Subaru: “Sorry, I took a bit of time trying to wake Emilia in the Tomb. Whatever you think I saw in there is just your imagination, you know.”

Garfiel: “Y’got some nerve givin’ me that. Yer whole body’s reekin’ of the Witch’s stench, y’think y’can fool me with that? Ah?”

Subaru: “———”

Wrinkling his nose as he said this, Garfiel’s words were full of hostility.

Hearing this, Subaru couldn’t say a thing. Yet, at the same time, he also sensed that something was out of place.

The reason for Garfiel’s hostility—— was the Witch’s Lingering Scent.

That had been Subaru’s conclusion in all the loops so far, and what Garfiel just said also verified this. The problem was the timing of when he brought this up in this loop was strange.

Subaru had been terribly nervous as he came out of the Tomb, expecting some sort of attack from Garfiel. Subaru had just Returned by Death, after dying right in front of the Witch, no less. So the Witch’s Lingering Scent must have been far thicker back then than now.

But, unexpectedly, Garfiel did not take any actions to attack him. Instead, he even seemed to be expressing genuine relief for Subaru and Emilia’s return. All throughout their meeting in Ryuzu’s house, and as he watched Garfiel leave the room, this very point had been bothering him.

Up until their parting, everything had been normal, and yet when they met again after only ten or so minutes, Garfiel’s attitude had drastically changed, and Subaru couldn’t imagine why.

Could it be that the stench was so pungent that his nose lost all sense of smell, and it only managed to recover after some time had passed?

Subaru lifted his arm to smell himself, but could only smell the fatigue that had accumulated over the course of the day. Resolving to wash himself as soon as he gets the chance, he turned to Garfiel.

Subaru: “About that Witch’s Lingering Scent... I’ve had quite a few people point that out to me before.”

Garfiel: “...Heh, that so? Those guys must have been pretty accommodatin’ t’not do anythin’ about it, oy. Such a revolting smell too, why would they, I wonder.”

Subaru: “They probably decided to overlook how I smelled and judge me based on my actions instead. It’d be a great help if you could do that too. At least, you let me go when I just came out of the Tomb, right?”

Garfiel: “———”

Subaru: “My loyalty to Emilia is beyond question, and I don’t intend to do anything to harm the Sanctuary. I hope you can believe that much. So, if you could just quietly let me off that’d be a huge help.”

From a conveniently optimistic standpoint, the fact that Garfiel didn’t attack the moment Subaru opened his mouth at least showed that he was still rational. So, it should be possible to reach a compromise through words.

In fact, Subaru could almost see a slight waver in Garfiel’s eyes. After all, Garfiel wasn’t the kind of person who would thoughtlessly eliminate Subaru just because he could sense the Witch’s Lingerin Scent on him. It was only when that stench was combined with some other condition that he began to take action.

Whatever it may be, in this loop, it didn’t seem to have triggered yet. So, it was up to Subaru to find out just what that trigger is in the meantime.

Garfiel: “...Y’haven’t answered my first question.”

Subaru: “Mm?”

Garfiel: “What did y’bastard see. In the Tomb. Whether I let y’go or not will depend on th’answer y’give me.”

Glaring at Subaru, Garfiel asked again, though the force in his voice had somewhat diminished from before.

There were only two kinds of answers Subaru could give him— Tthe truth, or the same lies he told to Emilia. Which one was the right solution? There was a need to make sure of that,

Subaru: “In that case, let me ask you a question as well.”

Garfiel: “Don’t get yer situation wrong here. I ask, y’answer. Y’want me t’eat ya?”

Subaru: “Don’t be mad. Allow your shoulders to relax, and just take it easy and answer.”

Garfiel bared his fangs, while Subaru slightly wiggled his shoulders and drew in a deep breath.

Keeping the question lodged in his throat, he locked his eyes onto Garfiel, and,

—Here’s the moment of truth. He encouraged himself with that thought,

Subaru: “—I saw a bunch of kids who looked exactly like Ryuzu-san, you know anything about that?”

Arc 4 Chapter 54 - To Know Hell

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 12, Chapter 2 “I’ve Already Seen Hell”, Part 7 (heavily changed)

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken – [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

As the fatal question escaped his lips, Subaru realized exactly where he stood.

The words came out, landing safely in Garfiel’s ears— and the golden-haired youth’s expression changed. Witnessing this, for a moment, Subaru’s thoughts froze still.

It was the same Garfiel who had always kept up his guard around Subaru, sustaining the tough facade with his razor-sharp leer, determined not to show any sign of weakness.

But now, that expression was being twisted into something else.

It was almost like the expression of a child on the verge of tears after his most precious secret had been revealed.

Garfiel: “You... Th’hell did y’just say?”

But that fleeting, transient expression only lasted for an instant. As if eradicating that lapse of weakness, Garfiel squeezed shut his eyes, grit his teeth, and glared back at Subaru like a man possessed.

The silence that permeated the forest and the almost-lonely stillness was abruptly turned, as goosebumps crawled across Subaru’s skin on the receiving end of that stare.

It was his body reacting to the threat of impending danger. An exaggerated reflex to—

Subaru: “You look like you’re going to kill someone.”

Touching on that topic must have been the last thing Garfiel wanted. His reaction made Subaru quite certain of that.

Without uttering a sound, the coldness of Garfiel's glare only intensified with Subaru's mutter. The fleeting trace of weakness was gone, and, in its place, there was now only dagger-like malice directed at the target of his glare.

Pierced by that gaze, instincts warning of danger pulsed throughout Subaru's body. But, consciously ignoring this, Subaru kept up his undaunted facade,

Subaru: "Do I have to say it again? I saw some kids who looked exactly like Ryuzu-san wandering around the Sanctuary. And I'm pretty sure they weren't Ryuzu-san."

Garfiel: "...I don't know what y'mean. So y'saw Granny takin' a walk? It'd be another question if she's strollin' around in th'middle of th'night, but that ain't anythin..."

Subaru: "—Two of them."

Garfiel: "Hah?"

Just as Garfiel tried to rationalize what Subaru described, his desperate excuses shattered as Subaru held up two fingers on his outstretched hand,

Subaru: "I saw two kids looking exactly like Ryuzu-san walking around at the same time. Maybe one of them was Ryuzu-san, but then... Who would the other one be—"

—The moment he finished his sentence, all sense of up and down blurred into one.

Subaru: "—Ghua!"

He felt his back slamming into something hard, wrenching all the air out of his lungs.

His spine had crashed into something large and uneven— the trunk of a tree, and was being pinned there by an enormous force as he dangled sideways, unable to escape.

Suspending Subaru in mid-air with his hand pinning his stomach against the tree, Garfiel stared straight into Subaru's eyes,

Garfiel: “—And where th’hell did y’see that, oy.”

Subaru: “Nowhere too weird... Just... in the forest...”

Garfiel: “No... that ain’t possible. We took too much fuckin’ care t’make sure that wouldn’t happen, or it would’ve been found out by y’nosy bastards a long time ago.”

Garfiel’s palm pressed harder as he spoke, sending stomach fluids spilling from Subaru’s lips. Regardless of Subaru’s struggling and kicking, the arm wouldn’t budge an inch.

Like an insect pinned up for display. He shuddered at the thought.

Garfiel: “Yer belly’s gonna touch yer back if we keep doin’ this? How ‘bout y’start tellin’ the truth before that happens?”

Twisting his lips into a sadistic grin, Garfiel amped up the pressure against Subaru’s body. As if Garfiel was proving that he wasn’t joking, Subaru could feel his bones and organs beginning to creak. Gasping, heaving painful breaths,

Subaru: “Th... at’ll, depend on your atti... tude.”

Garfiel: “Now ain’t that funny. Y’sstill think y’can negotiate with me on equal footin’? I thought I taught ya t’get rid of those conceited ideas?”

Subaru: “You could just... finish me off here without getting any answers, but that won’t solve anything.”

Garfiel: “...”

Uttering those fragmented words, Subaru could sense that Garfiel was listening.

—Subaru had half-expected this furious reaction from Garfiel up to now.

The only time Subaru actually saw the Ryuzu clones was during their final showdown with the Witch in the previous loop.

Outside of that event, there hasn't been anything to suggest that the clones even existed. Although, trawling back through his memories and approaching with the assumption the clones existed, there were several scenes where he had let hints toward their existence slip away.

Regardless, that demonstrated just how well the clones were hidden in Sanctuary. It's hard to imagine Garfiel keeping the existence of more than twenty replicants a secret, so it was probably something known among the residents of the Sanctuary.

If anyone on this side knew about it, it would be Roswaal, and possibly Ram.

Either way, just mentioning it was enough to put Garfiel on edge, that much was the expected half.

As for the unexpected half—

Garfiel: "...Y're fucked up."

Spitting this out, Garfiel released Subaru's body.

Without any warning, Subaru dropped to the ground with a surprised "uwa". Rolling, tasting grass and soil in his mouth, he spat out the dirt and stood himself up. Then, looking back at Garfiel,

Subaru: "D—don't just let go all of a sudden, scared me there."

Garfiel: "Shut up, freak. Quit fuckin' around. Y'fuckin' testin me?"

Subaru: "Testing?"

Seeing Subaru tilt his head, playing dumb, Garfiel clicked his tongue, leering,

Garfiel: "Y'thought I was gonna kill ya when y'said that, didn't ya."

Subaru: "..."

—The half that Subaru didn't expect was that Garfiel chose not to immediately kill him.

Even when provoked like this, Garfiel was still giving him a chance to explain himself.

Realizing that Subaru had said those words knowing they might result in his death, Garfiel violently kicked his foot into the ground,

Garfiel: “Quit fuckin’ around... Y’think yer gonna stake yer fuckin’ life and act like nothin’s happenin’? Y’fuckin nutcase. Y’make me sick.”

Subaru: “Kinda hurts when you put it like that... and it’s not like I don’t care or anything.”

Subaru smiled weakly at Garfiel and scratched his own head. While doing so, he noticed that his fingers were actually shaking.

Although Garfiel had stopped inflicting pain on Subaru, his hostility did not seem to diminish in the slightest. And even now, Subaru’s physical body was screaming with primal terror as though his organs were being wrenched and twisted.

It’s natural. He’d purposefully enraged Garfiel, and was now standing directly opposite to him.

That is to say, Subaru more or less understood that he was facing down the same giant golden tiger who rampaged through the forest in the night, slaughtering the villagers.

Just the memory of its ravaging fangs and claws froze his heart with terror. But still—

Subaru: “If just my life is enough to fix everything, then that’s a pretty fair trade.”

If whittling down at Subaru’s heart was the only price to pay, then it’d be quite a bargain.

It’s not every day that you can get a *medetai owari*¹²⁸ so cheaply. Even though Subaru’s resolve could break at any moment—the meager foundation supporting it was firm and unbreakable.

Garfiel must have understood this as well. Crunching up his nose into a disgusted grimace,

Garfiel: “I got no good impressions of a bastard with eyes like that. Normally, I’d crush ya on th’spot, but...”

¹²⁸ English flip. Means “happy ending” (めでたい終わり), originally “ハッピーエンド” (happy end).

Subaru: "I'd be pretty bummed out if you did that... I'd still prefer if you could magnanimously overlook this. And it really sounds like we're speaking the same language here... So."

Garfiel: "..."

Subaru: "Any chance you feel like answering my question?"

Patting off the dirt on his body, Subaru asked once again.

Garfiel's face soured at the return of the forcefully interrupted topic, and, turning his eyes away,

Garfiel: "Don't wanna."

Subaru: "Is that right. Oh well, no helping it."

Getting a reply that sounded like something from a stubborn child, Subaru shrugged and casually dropped the topic.

In return, an expression of complete bafflement came onto Garfiel's face.

Garfiel: "Y'... aren't y'gonna..."

Subaru: "But you don't want to talk, right? And I don't have the power or the persuasive skills to make you. Well I mean, I could keep bugging you to tell me, but the rewards aren't really worth the risk, so maybe another time."

Garfiel: "...What?"

Subaru: "Oh don't make that confounded face, Garfiel. No matter how much you want to keep your secrets hidden, I'll be sure to expose it. I kind of have to, you know."

Garfiel's head sprang back up at those words, and Subaru returned his gaze head-on.

Their eyes met, but there was no longer the same tension as before. The spirit in Garfiel's pupils seem to have faded, while Subaru's steeled their resolve.

Subaru: "Garfiel. I'll be sure... to expose all the Sanctuary's secrets you people are trying to hide. I know I have no other choice, so I'll absolutely make sure of it."

Garfiel: "...Shut up. Y'realize if I stuff yer fuckin' mouth right now there ain't gonna be no «absolutely» or «sure of» t'speak of, oy."

Subaru: "Sorry, but I'm absolutely sure. As long as I haven't given up, I know I'll uncover everything there is to uncover. If there's anyone to blame for that, blame your own sloppiness."

Not understanding Subaru's words, Garfiel's eyes wavered with confusion.

Naturally, he couldn't have known what Subaru found. After all, it was a mistake he hadn't yet made.

Subaru: "...Guess there's no point even if we keep talking."

Watching the silenced Garfiel, Subaru decided to end the conversation here.

He had raised Garfiel's caution to its utmost limit, and after this bluff, there was already no way he could disarm him in this loop.

Although Subaru never had much hope of success in this loop, seeing it completely fall apart like this was still somewhat hard to bear.

Subaru: "But..."

—But he must endure it nonetheless.

Since he had resolved to wager his life, this wouldn't be the last time where he'd have to bear this sense of loss.

He would probably never get used to, or manage to forget that pain.

Surely, if he ever got used to the endless cycle of deaths, only to find that he could no longer truly desire the future ahead of him, Subaru's heart would be swallowed by darkness, never to return. Somehow, he just knew this.

Subaru: "You still want to stop me, don't you, Garfiel?"

Garfiel: "..."

Subaru: "If you do, that'll only draw things out longer. So it'd help if you didn't."

Even if Garfiel killed him now, Subaru would just be returned to the Tomb, a few hours ago.

Everything after that would feel like a throwaway match, and if Garfiel pulled him aside again, he should be fine if he just chose some safer responses.

Though of course, it'd be better if he could avoid Returning by Death altogether.

Garfiel didn't respond to Subaru's prodding.

Seeing this, Subaru turned his back, and began walking out of the forest towards the Sanctuary. He would need to begin planning tomorrow's actions, and organize all the things that must be confirmed.

Although he has as many chances as his willpower would allow, that didn't mean he should waste them.

Garfiel: "You..."

Watching Subaru walk further and further away, Garfiel called to him with a voice of stifled emotion. Subaru stopped, but did not turn around. Staring at his back, Garfiel muttered,

Garfiel: "Just what... are y'tryin' to do in th'Sanctuary? What do y'plan t'do with us, ah? Oy."

Subaru: "I've already told you. I intend to save Emilia. I don't plan to do any harm to the Sanctuary... or to you, for that matter."

He knew of the disaster that was going to befall the Sanctuary, and intended to rescue its residents from their fate. Naturally, Garfiel would be counted among them.

But that would only be the final result,

Subaru: "I'm sure I'll make you despise me many times over before we get there. I'll apologize for that in advance... Sorry."

Garfiel: "...I've got no idea what yer sayin'. Everythin' y'said... yer soundin' exactly like 'em."

Garfiel spoke as if he was speaking to something frightening and incomprehensible, and Subaru could only resign to the fact that it was inevitable.

As much as he wanted to be understood, he knew that Garfiel couldn't possibly understand.

Subaru: “I don’t want to fight you. From tomorrow onwards, just act normal... It’s alright if you can’t, but don’t get in my way. Go back to a warm bed and get some early sleep for tonight. Oversleep, shirk your duties, or wake and go right back to bed for all I care—”

Tossing out these last words before leaving, Subaru suddenly stopped mid-sentence.

Just now, he had noticed something in what he just said. And from there, an idea had taken shape in his mind—

Subaru: “Might be worth trying.”

Garfiel: “...Hah?”

Subaru: “Anyways, that’s it for tonight, Garfiel. Whatever your worries and concerns are, I’ll take care of everything. So just be patient and wait until then.”

Garfiel: “—! You...!”

Listening to Subaru speak in future tense from beginning to end, Garfiel’s head shot up.

His face flushed with anger, he bared his teeth, spitting,

Garfiel: “Don’t give me that condescending bullshit...! Who, who th’fuck asked ya t’take care’of anything? Don’t go meddlin’ in what’s none’of yer business! Granny, th’others... anything! Y’don’t fuckin’ know anything...!”

Subaru: “I don’t know, so I have to find out. That’s why I have to do this.”

Garfiel: “Yer only seein’ th’fuckin’ surface, how can y’possibly understand!? Smirkin’ like an idiot, prattlin’ outta dreams, muddlin’ things with fuckin’ pretty words y’fuckin’ con-artist piece’of shit!”

Subaru: “———”

Garfiel: “Y’don’t know pain, don’t know what sufferin’ feels like, so don’t fuckin’ talk like y’know everything—!!”

Garfiel screamed back, raving at Subaru’s arrogant facade.

The shouts dissolved into the night's forest sky, and faded into nothing.

Condescending, speaking like he knew everything, meddling in what was none of his business despite not understanding a thing.

—Indeed, all this was true, and there was not the slightest ground to dispute it. However,

Subaru: "...I do know."

Garfiel: "——"

Subaru: "I know what hell is— So many times, I've seen it."

If there was hell in this world, it'd be all the worlds that Subaru had seen.

At the end of countless worlds, burning those scenes of hell into the back of his eyes, certainly, he knew it well. And that was why—

Subaru: "It's enough that I'm the only one who has to know that hell. That is the reason I'm here."

—He sincerely believed this in that moment.

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After leaving Garfiel whimpering and clutching his heart, Subaru did not return to his bed inside the cathedral.

He would have headed to bed and set about slowly figuring out his strategy for the near future. In fact, until recently that had been his intention.

But there was a reason he chose to discard that plan and head somewhere else instead.

Subaru: "...It should be this way if I remember correctly."

Peeling aside the sprawling ivy, Subaru muttered to himself while making his way down the unmarked path.

Visibility was poor under the forest canopy that obscured the moonlight. The dense, knee-high weeds didn't help, either. There was no consistency to the uneven ground, and he was forced to slow his pace to keep himself from stumbling.

Subaru: "While I'm usually pretty confident about my sense of direction, the memory's too hazy, huh... But it's not like I had time to calmly look around the place, so guess there's no helping it."

Making lame excuses for himself, Subaru felt his way forward through the foliage.

This was the forest outside the Sanctuary—but quite far away from where he and Garfiel last spoke. Subaru had first gone back to the Sanctuary before entering the forest again. As for why he did that—

Subaru: "Pretty sure this was where he showed up back then..."

Before this series of loops began—on the morning of the First Trial, Subaru had visited the Tomb with Otto to confirm his qualification.

In the end, the Tomb accepted Subaru, and he was granted the chance to challenge his past in the Trials that night—but there was something else before that. That morning, while bantering with Otto on the way back, they were confronted by Garfiel who had emerged from the forest. At the time, he said he was patrolling the Sanctuary.

Subaru: "But the timing was too good to be a coincidence, and why did he come from that direction?"

It was almost like the timing of his appearance had been staged, and there was the problem of where he appeared from.

Recalling how Garfiel emerged from the bushes beside the Tomb, Subaru felt a sense of *déjà vu*. Sifting through the peculiarities in his memories, he realized something.

—It was the mysterious facility where Beatrice had teleported him from the mansion.

Having been returned to the Sanctuary, coming out of that facility, he had a feeling that it was terribly close to where Garfiel had emerged back then.

And so, hoping to find something there, he was now trawling through the forest in the dead of night, searching for the path to that facility.

Subaru: “A trodden path... That means.”

Seeing the vegetation give way to patches of exposed earth, Subaru deduced that someone must have been regularly passing through here. Following this trail deeper into the forest, carried along by the exhilaration and speeding up his steps— At last, his field of vision brightened,

Subaru: “...Found it.”

It was a crumbling stone building. An ancient structure on the verge of collapse in the depths of the forest with its back against the cliff face.

Approaching the structure, as he made out its contours obscured by the darkness, Subaru tilted his head.

Subaru: “Huh...? Pretty sure last time I saw it, it was more destroyed than this...”

The building was certainly showing its years, but Subaru got the feeling that its state of deterioration was less severe than he remembered. Simply put, what Subaru saw last time was a ruin, whereas the building before him still retained some semblance of its original architecture. That is to say,

Subaru: “If my memory’s correct, then sometime between now and the sixth day, something destructive will happen to this building... Right?”

Drawing from the sum of his memories, that would be the only conclusion.

If that were the case, then, just as he imagined, this place was not entirely unrelated to what was going to happen to the Sanctuary.

Holding his breath, and stifling anything that might give away his presence, Subaru carefully turned the handle on the door.

It opened with surprising silence, and a putrid stench greeted him as he stepped inside.

Same as last time, scattered instruments littered the otherwise barren and desolate entryway. Passing through a corridor reminiscent of a waiting room, Subaru headed towards the destined chamber.

He reached the door at the end of the hallway— and beyond it, would be the room with the bottomless pit where Beatrice had transported him.

He might just walk into the pit if he wasn't careful. So, with that in mind, Subaru slowly pushed open the door and peeked his head inside,

Subaru: "...Oy, oy."

As the scene panned out before his eyes, Subaru couldn't help but let slip this sound under his breath.

A pale, refracted light lit up his face. Narrowing his eyes at the dazzling brightness, Subaru dumbly turned his gaze to the source of that light.

And there, in that destined chamber at the very back of the facility, was—

Subaru: "Ryuzu-san...?"

—A small female figure encased in the center of a massive crystal, faintly glowing with a pale-blue luminescence.



Illustration from Volume 12, coloring by DdukaE ([source](#))

Arc 4 Chapter 55 - The Girl in the Crystal

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 12, Chapter 2 “I’ve Already Seen Hell”, Part 3

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

—Subaru was so transfixed by the girl sealed inside the crystal that he forgot to breathe.

Such was the haunting, heart-rending beauty before his eyes.

Encased in the translucent, faint-blue crystal was a girl sitting with legs folded.

Frozen— may be an apt description, but unlike ice, which melts and releases whatever was inside, a crystal would remain eternally sealed until it was shattered. But surely, if this crystal were to be shattered, so would the body of the girl who had been sealed inside.

Subaru: “Why... would...”

The words slipping from his lips carried a tinge of rage.

Subaru was calm, but he certainly felt anger.

There was no way to safely release the girl from the crystal. He didn’t know what whoever did this might be planning, or what relation that person might have to this girl. He didn’t know, but he couldn’t stop it from tearing at his heart.

Subaru: “This is Ryuzu-san... isn’t she?”

He stepped into the room— And, contrary to his memories of last time, there was no giant hole in the floor. Instead, settled in its place was the crystal.

It was a tall crystal, set on a metallic base which was the only equipment not in a state of disrepair in the otherwise ruined facility, shining like it was fresh out of a factory. Opposite to the crystal were

several tables lined up in a row, and Subaru realized that they were the same ones that were toppled and scattered over the room in the previous world.

Same as last time, there were no lights in the room, but the faint glow of the moss on the walls ensured a certain degree of visibility.

Instruments reminiscent of medical equipment that he had seen scattered against the wall were now in perfect condition. Sifting out these differences in his memories, Subaru arrived at the conclusion,

Subaru: “Six days from now, this place will have been destroyed, in a way that no one could figure out what was going on in here.”

It would be inconvenient if anyone found out about this place.

Sometime between now and the Great Rabbit’s attack, the key components of this facility would be destroyed, and its rubble buried into the darkness.

But this time, Subaru arrived before that could happen.

Subaru: “And sure enough, the most likely candidate... is Garfiel.”

What made Subaru search here in the first place was his sense of unease towards Garfiel’s suspicious behavior.

Determined to protect the Sanctuary and with his unmistakable affection for Ryuzu, there must be some reason unbeknownst to Subaru why Garfiel would be doing this.

Simply put, there weren’t many people whose strength could match Garfiel’s, so, considering the extreme difficulty of actually destroying the facility, there was reason to believe it was Garfiel. The question that remained would be—

Subaru: “What is this facility actually used for?”

Although the room was fortunately intact, Subaru’s inspection yielded no obvious results. Aside from a girl who looked exactly like Ryuzu encased inside a crystal fixed to the room, nothing stood out and caught Subaru’s attention.

In the back of the room, on the wall beyond the row of tables, Subaru saw the ventilation shaft that he had crawled through last time. Passing through it should land him back in the waiting room.

Subaru: "...It's pretty late at this point, but what's with the weird layout? All this can't just be for one big room plus a waiting room."

Contrary to the layout of the rooms inside, the exterior of the facility looked a lot larger than this.

The more he tried to match his mental map with what he saw outside, the stronger the sense of incongruity became— There was enough space to conceal a whole other room.

Cutting across the room, Subaru walked up to the wall beneath the ventilation shaft and began tapping to feel its surface. The moss-covered wall felt more like an animal's fur than actual moss.

His knocks did not produce a sound, and, aside from lighting the room, they seemed to be also serving another purpose. Location-wise, if there was a mystery room, it would be on the other side of this wall.

Subaru: "Considering how far I had to crawl, there should be a room half the size of this one. Unless there's some kind of rotating wall... there'd be no way to get into that room from here..."

In that case, the entrance might be in the waiting room.

Last time, Subaru didn't have a chance to search every corner of the facility. Nor did he care to look for any hidden doors when he passed through the narrow waiting room this time. In fact, he was so preoccupied with the girl inside the crystal that he had neglected the waiting room entirely— On that thought, he turned around,

???: "——"

When he came eye-to-eye with the person who had entered the room.

Subaru: "...Ah?"

???: "——"

Meeting gazes with those emotionless eyes, he let a sound escape from his throat.

The silhouette's round pupils stared back at Subaru— It was a girl wrapped in white cloth with long, pink hair. A figure who looked exactly like Ryuzu, but without any of the aura of the girl he knew. In fact, it gave off no aura at all.

Like empty space, it simply stood there. In other words,

Subaru: "Ah, Ryuzu-san's..."

Clone. The word flickered across his mind, but he hesitated before applying it to the girl. "Clone" was just a title that Subaru had imagined. The truth is, he had no idea where the girls actually came from, and felt a little guilty calling her that.

Subaru: "But then..."

Having no other name to call her with, he was stuck.

Watching Subaru fall into silence, the girl stood there quietly as well. Her expression did not move, and even whether she was breathing was suspect.

Subaru hesitated to make the first sound, while the doll only waited to be addressed.

—Seeing her quietly standing there, at last, Subaru made up his mind to open his mouth.

Subaru: "Y—you, uh. Can you understand what I'm saying?"

Ryuzu Clone: "——"

Subaru: "What's your name? Can I ask what you're doing here? Actually, what is this place, anyway?"

Ryuzu Clone: "——"

Subaru: "...Sanctuary, Garfiel, Ryuzu. You know those words?"

Ryuzu Clone: "——"

Three questions were met with three bouts of silence.

He thought the questions might have prompted her expression to change, but her face didn't move a muscle to any of the questions he asked. As if she was simply incapable of expression.

Nothing was happening— He was out of ideas.

But, just as Subaru was scratching his head, the girl suddenly moved.

Subaru: "...?"

The abrupt movement startled him, but the girl's pace was relaxed.

Same as when he entered the room, the girl stepped through the waiting room door and walked to the center of the room with unhurried steps— until she was in front of the crystal.

The girl inside the crystal looked exactly identical to the girl approaching it.

Standing before the girl sealed in eternal slumber, the unfettered girl bent over and reached for the lower part of the crystal's supporting base.

Ryuzu Clone: "———"

The lower part of the base opened with a clank, and Subaru's eyes widened. There seemed to be a flap on the lower section of the base that opened into some kind of storage space inside.

The girl squatted down and began working away, blocking his view of the interior as he stretched his neck. Shifting around trying to see, Subaru decided to step closer and confirm its contents once and for all, when,

Subaru: "—Uugh!"

An intense, putrid stench pierced his nostrils as Subaru covered his face, recoiling.

The shocking odor corroded the membranes inside his nose, and the sensation of smelling it was closer to pain than shock. His eyes teared up as he was overtaken by the pressure of his stomach's contents rushing to his throat.

Stench— It was the same putrid stench he remembered permeating the facility the last time he was here. Like some chemical concoction, suspected to contain substances harmful to the human body.

Subaru was sure that it must have come from the collapsed hole in the ground, but,

Subaru: “It was actually coming from inside that base... and the whole area around that crystal.”

Holding his nose, Subaru came to this conclusion as he drew closer with teary eyes.

It felt as though the stench was seeping into his pupils as the sight of the oblivious girl buried in her work sent shivers down his spine. Then, as he peeked down at her hands from the side, his eyes shot wide open.

—Inside the base, the girl’s hands were fiddling around with an internal segment carved with incomprehensible patterns with magical minerals installed in various places.

The minerals were faintly glowing from their stores of internal Mana, but one of them seemed to have used up its stores and lost its light. The girl carefully removed it and inserted a replacement in its place.

The complex patterns reminded him of what he saw in that last loop.

Magic circles— A staple technology of the parallel world fantasy genre was somehow inexplicably absent from this world. And that was precisely why it left such an impression when he did eventually encounter one and made him wonder just what function it may have served.

Subaru: “Seeing how the minerals are linked up... It kind of looks like an electrical circuit. If the magic circle is the mechanical part and the magic minerals are like the batteries...”

Subaru couldn’t help but be amazed by the sight.

Magical science, or should he call it arcane technology?

While Subaru occupied himself with such thoughts, the girl seemed to have finished her work, having extracted the spent mineral and closed the metal flap.

And, within seconds, Subaru felt a tingling sensation on his skin.

—There was a subtle vibration in the atmosphere.

Subaru: “It’s like... when magic is being used.”

Magic of tremendous force and magnitude— like during the battle with the White Whale, and when Julius activated Nect in their fight against Petelgeuse.

Most likely, it was some kind of interference in the atmospheric Mana, and his body was perceiving the corresponding shift in his own Mana.

In this case, it was obvious what the Mana was reacting to.

Before his eyes, he saw the crystal’s faint glow rapidly intensify. Translucent and blue, the crystal’s radiance compounded in the darkness of the room as the girl’s body grew ever more distinct.

And there, the magic circle inside the base, along with the crystal supported above, illuminated the room with blinding, pale-blue light.

Subaru: “...Savepoint.”

Subaru unconsciously muttered something that no one except those living in the modern age would understand.

A crystal on top of a magic circle, engulfing the room in a pale-blue radiance— That was exactly how Subaru remembered the familiar savepoint-crystals in his video games.

Captivated by the vivid spectacle, the silence in which it happened only adding to its mystique, Subaru held his breath, unable to voice his thoughts. But, as he stood rigid in front of the mesmerizing sight,

Ryuzu Clone: “———”

Without paying him any mind, after switching out the magical mineral, the girl began heading out of the room, chucking the inert mineral into what seemed to be a waste pile.

Hearing the footsteps grow distant behind him, Subaru quickly reached out to her shoulder.

Subaru: “Hey, h—hold on... Ah— touched her.”

Ryuzu Clone: “———”

With the apparent feebleness of her vibe and presence, Subaru had half-expected his hand to simply pass through her, but fortunately, his fingers wrapped around her shoulder and successfully stopped her.

Then, suddenly remembering that she was probably one of those girls who exploded upon contact with the Witch of Envy, Subaru’s caution instantly heightened,

Ryuzu Clone: “———”

But the girl only quietly looked at Subaru, without showing any signs of exploding.

Somewhat relieved by this fact, Subaru met the gaze of the girl who was still quite intact.

Subaru: “Sorry for interrupting your work, but I still want to ask... Can you not ignore me this time? I’m in kind of a jam here, you know.”

Ryuzu Clone: “———”

Subaru: “So, what were you doing just now? Why’s that crystal glowing? And do you know anything about the girl inside?”

Ryuzu Clone: “———”

Nothing was happening *futatabi*¹²⁹.

No matter how many times he asked, the girl only gazed at him in silence. She wasn’t refusing to answer, but rather, it was as if the choice wasn’t even available to her. The impression of her being a doll hadn’t changed at all.

Subaru: “If you could just manage some sort of yes-or-no *sotsyu*¹³⁰ then I’d have something to work with here...”

¹²⁹ English flip. Means “again/once more” (再び), originally “リテイク” (re-take).

¹³⁰ English flip. Means “mutual understanding/communication” (疎通), originally “コミュニケーション” (communication).

But, that wasn't happening.

Keeping hold of the girl who seemed to be ready to leave as soon as he let her go, Subaru turned to the crystal.

Nothing had changed about the girl inside her dazzling, glowing prison, but something else became clear with the intensified light. She wasn't breathing, and it was clear that she had no pulse.

—The body of the girl encased in the crystal lacked all signs of life.

Subaru: "...Suspended animation... would be an over-optimistic take on it."

Just reheating frozen bodies to return them to life would be a pipe-dream. Not to mention that this girl's body was crystallized.

Freeing her would be like a pipe-dream times two.

Subaru: "Once again... I'm so damn useless..."

Defeated by his own sense of powerlessness, Subaru touched his fingers to the surface of the crystal. He felt its coldness against his fingertips, and wasn't sure whether to feel relieved or enraged that this girl could not feel this chill eat away at her.

And, just as that sentiment scraped across his chest,

Subaru: "—Eh?"

The coldness at his fingertips suddenly turned to heat, passing through Subaru's arm and coursing through his body.

Subaru: "—Ohhh, ohhh, whoaaaaaaa!?"

What started as a warmth quickly turned to searing heat, scorching his entire body.

The flames running from his fingertips to his organs made Subaru recoil, crying out in pain.

Gripped by the suffocating heat, his screams echoed through the room.

Paying no heed to the filthiness of the floor, Subaru sprawled out onto the ground, convulsing as his eyes flashed between dark and light— And then,

Subaru: “—Ahhh, uh?”

Without so much as a warning, his time in hell ended as abruptly as it came. The heat ravaging through his body died away, and Subaru was suddenly released from the storm of agony.

Subaru: “...Wh—what the hell was—”

Sitting himself up, Subaru muttered while checking over his hands and feet.

The sudden pain, and its equally abrupt end. He couldn't understand its cause or its purpose, and it left him only questions and a painful memory.

Subaru: “There's... nothing. But, if nothing happened, then...”

Why did it hurt so much when he touched the crystal?

Perhaps it was the arcane technology at the base of the crystal. Something like touching inside a machine and getting electrocuted.

Coming to that thought, Subaru suddenly remembered the Ryuzu lookalike he had forgotten about while he was distracted by the pain.

Subaru: “Ah...”

Ryuzu Clone: “———”

Subaru scrambled to his feet, but the suspense fell away when he looked up and saw the girl's unchanged face. Then, through the unravelling tension,

Ryuzu Clone: “———”

—He saw the girl kneel with profound reverence, bowing her head before him.

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Seeing the girl on her knees, her head lowered, Subaru wasn't sure what to do.

If he wasn't mistaken, that gesture was a display of respect and submission towards him.

Subaru: "W—what're you doing all of a sudden?"

Having completely ignored him up to now, the sudden, drastic change left Subaru both surprised and skeptical.

Even if she was submitting to him like this, the gap between Subaru and the girl ran deep. Neither of them knew where the other came from, and, considering the circumstances, there was no way to not be suspicious.

Ryuzu Clone: "———"

In front of the cautious Subaru, the kneeling girl stood up.

Then, she lifted her gaze, as if looking at something behind Subaru's head. He turned around to see, but there was nothing there.

It was almost like how one would stare into empty space while thinking. And when Subaru turned back to her,

Subaru: "Whoaaa!?"

Ryuzu Clone: "———"

He saw the girl standing within breathing distance, right up against his eyes. Subaru tried to lean back, but the girl reached out her hand and grabbed him by the arm.

Subaru: "...? You... want me to come with you?"

Ryuzu Clone: "———"

Saying nothing, the girl tugged on his sleeve, signaling him to follow.

Seeing her nod wordlessly to his question, Subaru only stood there, thinking.

Maybe the reason she was so stubbornly refusing to talk was simply because she couldn't. But she did seem to understand his question. So maybe, by asking Subaru to follow, she was trying to reply to what he was asking earlier.

Subaru: "Well, can't get the tiger's cub without going in the tiger's den, right?"

Ryuzu Clone: "-----"

Subaru: "It's a thing from back home— Alright, lead on, I'll follow."

Subaru nodded back, gesturing that he'll go with her, and the girl started walking, still pulling on his sleeve. Following behind her, Subaru took one last look at the crystal.

—Same as before, the girl continued sleeping inside the pale-blue light.

Pulling him by the sleeve, she led him out of the room, through the corridor, the waiting area, and then, out of the facility.

Subaru: "So it's not inside, huh. Well, outside's ok too, but..."

If someone from the Sanctuary saw him, his stealth mission into the facility would be exposed. Although he didn't really do anything to feel guilty about, considering his current relationship with Garfiel, he'd rather avoid it this loop.

Just as he was worrying about what he should do if the girl starts leading him to the Sanctuary,

???: "—What's that, sure's a complicated expression you got there, Su-bo."

Subaru: "...Oy oy, what's with the timing?"

Stepping out of the facility and into the open air, he heard a voice calling out to him.

Turning to the direction of that voice, and seeing the person standing there, Subaru's lips slackened. Whether it was out of relief, or for some other reason,

Ryuzu: "I'm sure there're all sorts of things you want to talk about, but first, how about a change of location?"

Subaru: “Yeah, sounds good. There really are... lots of things we need to talk about.”

Subaru shrugged in agreement.

And, in that moment, just what did she see when she looked at him?

—With her back to the moonlight, seeing Subaru standing beside a girl who looked exactly like herself, just what was the original Ryuzu thinking in that moment?

Arc 4 Chapter 56 - The Purpose of Sanctuary

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 12, Chapter 1 “I’ve Already Seen Hell”, Part 4

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

The place where Ryuzu led him was the remote shed where she last invited him for tea.

Ryuzu: “Anywhere on the bed is fine. I’ll brew us something to drink.”

Subaru: “I could brew it if you like? Ram’s trained me pretty well, I think.”

Ryuzu: “While I’d love to see your expertise, it doesn’t look like you’re free at the moment.”

Ryuzu smiled as she pointed out the girl who looked exactly like herself, still tugging on Subaru’s sleeve without any indication of letting go.

While she was probably Ryuzu’s clone, Subaru wasn’t entirely sure if he should keep calling her that,

Subaru: “Say, why’s Pico still not letting go?”

Ryuzu: “I don’t know where you got the name Pico from, but things being as they are, I doubt there’s anything you can do so you should just accept it for now. That’s what happens when you touch things without thinking, you know.”

Subaru: “Can’t really argue with that...”

It sounded like Ryuzu was saying this for his own good, but Subaru still felt a little upset to be blamed for groping things without thinking. Seeing Subaru pouting to indicate his displeasure, Ryuzu brewed up the tea and came back with the tray in hand.

Ryuzu: “Here, it’s hot, so let it cool before drinking.”

Subaru: "I'm not a little kid anymore... I'm not gonna gulp it down and burn myself."

Ryuzu: "I have someone around me who never settles down and always has trouble with hot food, so the warning's gotten to be a habit."

Since Garfiel was the first person Subaru would think of to have trouble with hot food, Ryuzu was probably talking about him.

Seeing how Garfiel could transform into a giant tiger, the can't-settle-down and the cat-tongued descriptors were both a match, and having difficulty learning would be in line with Subaru's preconceptions as well.

Just as Ryuzu said, the tea was scalding hot. Subaru brought the cup to his lips, took a sip over his parched tongue, and sighed. Come to think of it, this was the first drink he had since Returning by Death and waking up in the Tomb.

Subaru: "Ahh, tastes just like leaves."

Ryuzu: "Have I just been given an unflattering review, or am I overthinking it?"

Subaru: "You're overthinking it, overthinking it."

Drinking down the rest of the tea, Subaru placed the cup back on the tray with a click. Ryuzu casually pulled up a chair beside the bed and sat down facing him.

Subaru: "So, now that we're settled, let's start going over the topics."

Ryuzu: "Hmm. And I have quite a few things I'd like to ask Su-bo as well."

Somewhat relieved by her straightforward reply, Subaru's mind began to turn.

He had plenty of opportunities to speak with persons of interest like this before, but he still hadn't gotten any closer to the truth. Part of it was due to intentional concealing of information, but there was another reason before that.

Subaru: "It's because I haven't asked the right questions."

The question that would link all the answers into a single thread still eluded him.

And so, all this time, Subaru had been missing the point without realizing it. Even something as simple as asking what he needed to know from those who knew was out of his reach.

Subaru: “That building... That facility back there. What exactly is it?”

Ryuzu: “Hmm... So that’s the question you’re starting with?”

The first thing that popped into his mind was an inconsequential feint.

A question to gauge just how upfront Ryuzu intended to be.

Hearing this, Ryuzu traced her fingers over her chin in a shrewd, seasoned gesture quite ill-suited for her appearance,

Ryuzu: “If you ask me what that facility is, the answer is that, in a sense, it is the core of the Sanctuary. In other words, it is part of the reason why the Sanctuary exists.”

Subaru: “The reason why the Sanctuary exists...!?”

Ryuzu: “In the first place, Su-bo... who do you think had a need to create the Sanctuary?”

Subaru: “That’d be Rosw—”

Blurting out an almost reflexive answer, Subaru instantly realized that couldn’t be right. While Roswaal was the current owner and manager of the Sanctuary, the question of who created the Sanctuary was a different story.

Subaru: “The one who created this place... was the Witch of Greed, Echidna, right?”

Ryuzu: “Correct. It was the Witch Echidna who created this place. The Witch created the Sanctuary because it was necessary to her. Ultimately, that’s all this place is.”

Subaru: “That’s a bit extreme, and skimping way too much in between... At least give me a few details.”

Ryuzu: “As for its purpose, isn’t the success of her experiments right in front of your eyes?”

Seeing Ryuzu's smile as she said this, for a moment, Subaru held his breath.

Ryuzu's words were vague, but he understood their meaning. What she was trying to say was,

Subaru: "The result of this place... was Ryuzu-san and this girl?"

Ryuzu: "You are a kind child, Su-bo. Or otherwise, a naive one—— It's fine to just say the experimental results."

Subaru hesitated to say this in front of the person herself.

If it was a matter of failing to read the air or simply being obtuse, it'd be a different story. But Subaru was keenly aware that this was not a time for jokes.

Ryuzu: "There is a girl inside the crystal who looks exactly like me, yes?"

Subaru: "...Yeah. Exactly identical. So, Ryuzu-san, this girl and her... you guys are triplets, I guess?"

Ryuzu: "If you're going to bunch every one of us who looks the same into one big family, calling us triplets would be falling a tad too short."

Subaru: "Just a tad?"

Ryuzu: "Just a tad."

Ryuzu's "tad" might be referring to a missing digit here.

In fact, having seen more than twenty Ryuzu clones at once, no one could blame him for thinking this.

Subaru sighed and shook off that thought.

So far, Ryuzu hadn't been trying to dodge Subaru's questions. Perhaps now was the time to stop feeling her out and dive in.

Subaru: "——The girl in the crystal... what's her relation to Ryuzu-san?"

He asked the question directly.

Ryuzu's expression was calm. Brushing her fingers through her light-pink hair, she turned a meaningful gaze towards Subaru— Or rather, towards the silent girl at his side.

Ryuzu: "Not just me. This girl is in the same position as me."

Subaru: "And the girl in the crystal?"

Ryuzu: "No, she is different. That girl inside the crystal... is the original."

Unable to instantly take in what he had just been told, Subaru furrowed his brows to show his non-understanding. Standing up from the bed, he chewed over the implications of her words,

Subaru: "The original, would mean that..."

Ryuzu: "Don't be in such a hurry. Trawling through memories takes time for the elderly. So get comfortable, and be patient."

Subaru: "Don't suddenly play the elderly card now. Just looking at this bland flavorless girl beside me I can tell that you're just trying to add seasoning!"

Ryuzu: "Hrm, that's an unfortunate misunderstanding. I consider all the things that make me what I am now, what you might call acquired individuality, to be quite important to me."

Subaru: "Acquired... individuality?"

Hearing something he could not let slide, Subaru repeated the words as a question. Ryuzu nodded, and with "That's right", she continued,

Ryuzu: "Just as you imagined, I am the same as this girl, born as an empty vessel. And through the passing of years, that empty cask was filled to become what I am today."

Subaru: "Wait, wait wait wait, the story's moving way too fast. Born? Empty? What's that supposed to mean? Maybe it's supposed to be obvious, but what does this have to do with how the girl in the crystal is the original?"

Ryuzu: "The one inside the crystal is the original. The first Ryuzu Meyer. All the other Ryuzus, including myself, are Ryuzu Meyer's replicas."

So casually, Ryuzu told him of her origins. Or actually, Subaru wasn't even sure if he should continue calling her Ryuzu.

What Ryuzu said just now was what Subaru himself vaguely hypothesized upon seeing the Ryuzu-replicants. He had half-suspected it but could not be entirely convinced, partly because he hated the feeling of knowing that someone he knew was a clone.

If there must be a reason, it would have been Subaru's own prejudice.

Ryuzu: "Now that you know I am a replica, does that affect how you see me?"

Subaru: "...I don't know. I want to say that it doesn't. I want to, but... when you put me on the spot like this..."

—He couldn't say for sure.

Strictly speaking, considering that this is a parallel world, he couldn't exactly call the many Ryuzu clones, and the way they were created was probably very different from what he imagined.

No doubt, they would have been born through magical rather than scientific means. Such a life shouldn't be considered superior or inferior— That would have been the appropriate thing to say, but,

Subaru: "I'm not confident enough to say it with a straight face. So I can't really say I'll see you the same way."

Ryuzu: "I suppose I should revise what I said before. Su-bo is kind and naive... And more than that, overly honest at heart."

Surely, those weren't words she was happy to hear, but Ryuzu gave him a satisfied nod, nonetheless. While sorting through the emotions in his mind, Subaru turned to the girl sitting beside him—the one he named Pico, who was in the same situation as Ryuzu.

—Silently holding onto Subaru's sleeve, Pico was staring blankly across the room. Although her eyes should be seeing the same image as Subaru's, they harbored nothing that could be considered emotions, and were more like glass beads reflecting the light around her.

Her expression hadn't changed, and he hadn't heard her make a single sound.

Subaru: “She’s completely empty inside, is that what you meant...?”

Ryuzu: “She was born not long ago, a replica who’s only just been given her role. She knows enough to recognize simple instructions, but otherwise, she is no different from a newborn. Although, seeing that she doesn’t cry or need to eat, she is quite a lot less trouble to take care of.”

Subaru: “She doesn’t need to eat...?”

Ryuzu: “Replicating a body isn’t so simple a task. What do you imagine were the principles behind her and my creation?”

Being asked to guess, Subaru held back his urge to ask for an immediate answer.

A greedy child who only knows how to ask and receive was not what Ryuzu expected of him.

Under the stern pressure of her gaze, Subaru mobilized his mind to scrutinize over her words, and eventually came up with,

Subaru: “Is it... Mana...?”

Muttering this, the basis of the Great Spirit who took the form of a cat’s existence flashed across his mind. Puck’s Spirit body manifests by using Mana as an intermediary. Reapplying that concept, it should be possible to materialize human bodies the same way as well.

Hearing Subaru’s guess, Ryuzu lifted her brows and gave a little clap.

Ryuzu: “Well done. I’m impressed that you reached that answer on your own. It doesn’t sound like anyone told you, either.”

Subaru: “Well, you did kinda guide me towards it. And being around a Spirit for so long helped as well... So, was I right?”

Ryuzu: “Almost correct. But manifesting bodies purely by using Mana as an intermediary means consuming it rapidly. Instead, the Witch of Greed forced her way around this problem with a special algorithm.”

Subaru: “Forced... An algorithm?”

Ryuzu: “She developed an algorithm for an organ to create artificial Od, which, once it stores up a certain amount of Mana, allows the body to materialize. And so, while the body is constructed from Mana, the presence of Od allows for living beings indistinguishable from “normal organisms to be created.”

Od— unlike the Mana in the atmosphere, it inherently exists in living things.

Though Od serves the same functions as Mana, it cannot be drawn from external sources, and a set lifetime amount is decided at birth. Using Od would be equivalent to shortening one’s own lifespan, and the result of its depletion is death.

It’s like using HP to cast magic when there isn’t enough MP— except there would be no way to regenerate the HP.

Subaru: “You make it sound so simple... but isn’t that incredible? Even if it’s artificial, being able to regenerate Od is basically like creating life.”

Ryuzu: “Of course, it is a phenomenon only possible when very specific initial conditions are met. Regrettably, it’s not something I myself could comprehend— Except, the Witch has successfully created life, that much is certain.”

Subaru: “Sounds completely ridiculous... but that girl’s pretty amazing.”

He could just imagine the white-haired Witch looking down at him with a smug smile on her face. But then, his thoughts immediately turned to,

Subaru: “Wait, but Daphne could also create Witchbeasts. Unless creating life, is just surprisingly easy for Witches? It’s not as rare as I thought.”

He could almost hear the white-haired Witch moaning “It’s not like I did it to get your approval or anything”.

Ryuzu: “What’s that, you look like you’re thinking about something heart-warming.”

Subaru: “It’s weird, but it feels like our exchanges have completely melted any sense of caution towards her. Anyway, I understand Ryuzu-san’s origins now. Echidna made replicas of a girl named Ryuzu Meyer back there, I get that too...”

Now that Subaru understood the principle behind the replicants and that Ryuzu herself had accepted that fact, the overarching question would be,

Subaru: “Next question is, why would Echidna do something like that?”

Ryuzu: “Hmm...”

Subaru: “Since I barely know anything about magic or algorithms, I can only guess how amazing Echidna’s achievements are from the surface. But even just looking at it, I can tell it’s pretty huge.”

Ryuzu crossed her arms, listening, while Subaru inhaled a breath and continued,

Subaru: “So where did she get the motivation to do something that huge? What’s her motive? And why’s it necessary for Echidna to make replicas of Ryuzu Meyer?”

He still didn’t know what the girl named Ryuzu Meyer was to the Sanctuary.

In the present-day Sanctuary, the Ryuzu he was talking to served as a representative-slash-Ryuzu look-alike. But what was the original Ryuzu Meyer’s role in the Sanctuary’s hierarchy?

Or, what if she was the actual impetus for the Sanctuary’s creation?

Subaru: “I just thought of something, that might be it.”

Ryuzu: “Oh?”

Subaru: “This kind of story always sells. Maybe she did it in order to replace the original Ryuzu Meyer, who somehow met an untimely death.”

Tropes like retrieving lost loved ones from death always show up in manga and light novels. Creating clones of the deceased with identical DNA as a substitute is a pretty popular plot device, and most of the time, they’ll offer some reason like “Their bodies are the same but their souls are different”, and end in failure.

Subaru: “Going by what you said, and looking at Pico, the experiments of the Sanctuary probably ended up with the same problem. You guys are made to look the same, but the personalities and quirks didn’t carry over, I’m guessing.”

If she refused to give up and kept making more and more replicas anyway, that could perhaps be considered insanity. But to persist after more than twenty failures, still hoping that the original soul might be inhabiting the next one, that could only be called—

Subaru: “I don’t want to dismiss it as delusional, but...”

It’s hard to blame someone for wanting to bring a certain person back to life. At least, Subaru definitely couldn’t bring himself to say it.

Even now, Natsuki Subaru was working towards a future where everyone would be saved. The methods and processes were different, but was that really so different from the Witch’s experiments?

As for what the Ryuzu clones born as a result of the experiments thought of this, that would be a question only they could ask themselves, and which no one else could answer. Listening to Subaru bring his speculations to a close, Ryuzu exhaled a sigh,

Ryuzu: “Your head turns quicker than I thought, Su-bo.”

Subaru: “With everything that’s been thrown at me, it’s actually way too slow. Hate to say it, but still.”

Subaru clicked his tongue at his overly slow deductive skills and ruefully gritted his teeth.

Seeing Subaru this way, Ryuzu slowly shook her head. But it wasn’t a gesture meant to console him. Instead, a subtle smile emerged on her lips, hosting a tinge of melancholy,

Ryuzu: “Except, you are overthinking it. It wouldn’t be exaggerating to call that a fantasy.”

Subaru: “Fantasy... I didn’t know I was that far off...”

Ryuzu: “A fantasy indeed. This is what you thought, isn’t it— «No matter how arduous the effort, she must be brought back to life. That’s how precious and important Ryuzu Meyer was to the Witch of Greed». Am I wrong?”

Subaru: “...”

Ryuzu tilted her head as she asked this, and hearing her strike the crux of the matter, Subaru fell silent.

In fact, that was exactly what Subaru imagined. Developing a brand-new algorithm, going through all this strenuous effort just to extend one person's existence— Naturally, that person must be someone especially important to the Witch.

But Ryuzu refuted this conclusion with a smile. A pained, and hollow smile.

Ryuzu: "Ryuzu Meyer was just a village girl. She wasn't anyone particularly close to the Witch of Greed. And naturally, they had no blood or matrimonial ties. To the Witch, Ryuzu Meyer was just a stranger, with barely a word exchanged between them."

Subaru: "How is that... No, hold on."

Listening to Ryuzu say this as if she had seen it herself, Subaru suddenly held up his palm to stop her. He pressed his other hand against his forehead, and,

Subaru: "But isn't this strange? You said just now... That you're the same as Pico, born with nothing inside. Then how did you know that about the Ryuzu Meyer inside the crystal? It doesn't make sense."

Ryuzu: "That would be the result of another experiment conducted in this Sanctuary."

Gently receiving Subaru's rebuttal, Ryuzu placed a hand to her chest.

If what she said was true, then there would be no heartbeat pulsing against her hand. But then, where did the warmth when he touched her come from? —While Subaru's mind wondered, Ryuzu closed her eyes,

Ryuzu: "Ryuzu Meyer was not close to the Witch. But she sacrificed herself for the experiment. The Witch took Ryuzu Meyer's body and sealed it eternally inside the crystal. From there, she designed an algorithm, which, once it has accrued a certain amount of Mana, would generate a replica of Ryuzu Meyer through artificial Od, and it remains so to this day."

Subaru: "...But why?"

Ryuzu: "Ryuzu Meyer's replicants, aside from a minimal understanding of language and common concepts, are in a state no different from newborns. Yet that in itself is strange. If they are the same as

newborns, then they should be crying, ignorant, and pure. But where did they acquire the level of knowledge to follow basic instructions?”

Subaru: “Unless... No way.”

Thinking of the worst of possibilities, Subaru lost his words.

Seeing Subaru’s expression, Ryuzu figured that he must have got it, and nodded,

Ryuzu: “The Witch had formulated a way to pick and choose knowledge to confer upon the replicas. But she chose to give them only the minimal and let them be born empty of all else.”

Subaru: “You mean, having them born without knowing anything is just the way she intended? But, why would...”

What’s the point of a ritual that only produces dolls that follow orders? Of course, such a thing isn’t inconceivable. But that would be far too uncharacteristic of the Witch of Greed he knew.

Would the white-haired girl really go through so much trouble just to create moving bodies akin to her own arms and legs?

Subaru: “Not sure if she could do this, but wouldn’t catching some humans and brainwashing them be cleaner and faster? Instead, she went with this. There must be some other reason.”

To create empty, new existence from nothing—

Subaru: “—Ah.”

For an instant, a thought flashed across his mind.

Deciding that it was far too preposterous, Subaru shook his head to forget it. But once the thought was born, it clung to him and would not let go. If that really was the case,

Echidna: “I wouldn’t want you to despise me.”

That would explain why she wanted to hide her true intentions from him.

And why the Ryuzu in front of his eyes was allowed to inherit a small portion of Ryuzu Meyer’s memories.

Subaru: “If she could pick and choose knowledge to give them, why would she choose to create empty replicas.”

Ryuzu: “...”

Subaru: “Create empty vessels, and then what? Same as why anyone places empty vessels on a table...”

Ryuzu: “...”

Subaru: “—It’s to fill them with something, isn’t it.”

The reason she prepared these empty vessels was so she could fill them with knowledge and memories. Keeping the one inside the crystal as the immutable original. By spawning a limitless number of replicas, capable of storing an infinite volume of knowledge—

Subaru: “If she could burn her own memories and knowledge into the Ryuzu Meyers’ bodies, over and over. If she could do that, then it’d be like...”

Ryuzu: “—Immortality, in a sense.”

—And that was the truth of the experiments of the Sanctuary.

Arc 4 Chapter 57 - An Experiment in Immortality

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 12, Chapter 2 “I’ve Already Seen Hell”, Part 5

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

—Immortality.

The stuff of fables throughout all of time, and an ideal which any living being would have at some point considered.

Never aging, never crumbling, outside the reach of reincarnation, the self which persists in perpetuity. Despite violating the very principles of life, how many have been enraptured by that pinnacle of existence.

Subaru: “Immortality... Huh.”

Repeating the word under his breath, Subaru almost broke out laughing at such unrealistic ambition. But instead, his cheeks stiffened, and couldn’t even manage a proper smile. While half of him wanted to laugh it off as something ludicrous, the other half shuddered at the knowledge that the Witch’s experiments were far from fiction.

Subaru: “That’s quite a common aspiration for the likes of a Witch. Immortality or whatever... That just gives off the impression of a puny little person who’s scared of dying, you know.”

Ryuzu: “Whether being afraid of death makes a person puny would depend on who you ask. At least, the Witch of Greed isn’t so resigned towards the idea. It is natural to fear death, and to seek ways to overcome it... though most of the time, they fail due to a lack of ability, and end as no more than fantasies.”

Subaru: “Except, Echidna does have the ability. She might’ve even thought of all sorts of ways to do it. I wouldn’t put it past that clever brain of hers.”

Looking at Pico, sitting beside him, Subaru bit down on his lips feeling an emotion he couldn't put into words.

Pico didn't react to his gaze, but simply continued to sit there silently as if in some sort of idle mode. Seeing this, "Haa...", Subaru sighed,

Subaru: "Right. It's like there's nothing inside... No personality or anything."

Ryuzu: "Her state is like that of a marionette. The epitome of a perfectly prepared vessel. All that's left is to fill her with whatever the Witch desires."

Subaru: "But how's all this coming along? Not saying I know the theory behind it, but I think I have a rough idea of what she's trying to do."

That is, to download her own knowledge and memories into the empty vessel.

If it was only a matter of data, Subaru wouldn't have felt so repulsed.

But the subject in question was a person's identity. More than that, it was a person whom Subaru knew, on the inside and out.

Subaru: "Taking her own memories and injecting them into an empty body. Assuming it succeeds, she could just repeat the process when one dies. It really would be like a kind of immortality. But..."

Passing on one's personalities and memories would certainly be akin to overcoming death.

After all, as long as the data that comprises the person is kept safe, even if the container is destroyed, it could be revived in another vessel. By making copies of herself and copies of empty bodies— Echidna would indeed be immortal, at least in theory.

—But then,

Subaru: "People usually panic when they meet parallel world versions of themselves and get stuck with a sense of obligation that they absolutely have to eliminate the other."

Ryuzu: "..."

Subaru: “Guess it’s because they can’t stand the feeling of seeing themselves outside of themselves. Just thinking about it, I can already see the icky situation awaiting her in the future... Hey, Ryuzu-san.”

Ryuzu: “What?”

Subaru: “By making so many Ryuzu Meyer bodies... and then filling them with her personalities, she’s not only perpetuating herself, but also making multiple copies of herself, right?”

Theoretically, that should also be possible.

From a purely theoretical standpoint, when the goal is to perpetuate oneself indefinitely, the more backups there are, the better.

If even Subaru thought of that, there was no way the Witch hadn’t thought of it too.

Subaru: “Wonder what it feels like, to have other back-ups prepared. Even if you fail, there’s a sort of insurance ready and waiting. What do you make of that, Ryuzu-san?”

Ryuzu: “...I doubt I’ll ever understand it. I am not too knowledgeable on the techniques of extracting personalities, but just speaking for myself, losing my only body would mean the end of what I am. In that sense, I am no different from Su-bo in that I’d have no recourse from the loss of my body.”

Subaru: “Is that right. Yeah... Yeah, of course.”

Subaru couldn’t help but let out a dry smile at Ryuzu’s statement. Ryuzu furrowed her brows at Subaru’s reaction, but there was no way she could possibly know what his reaction actually meant.

Subaru: “Right, that explains it. Yeah... Now I kinda understand why it feels like there’s no space between us...”

Subaru spilled a sigh as the white-haired Witch surfaced in his mind.

Preparing copies of herself, transferring her personality to achieve near-immortality. By doing so, her life was virtually assured.

Subaru: “In that case, how is that any different from me?”

He couldn't bring himself to despise her for it.

Instead, it was a sense of closeness that surged up inside. Although calling it "closeness" might give rise to some questionable emotions, there was also the dark sense of elation to have found someone who shared his situation.

Echidna, who used her own methods to achieve a piece of immortality.

And Subaru, played on the palms of the Witch's hands, returning from death, striving for the destined future.

Both rebelling against the law which stated that there can only be one life. In that sense, Subaru thought,

—Isn't Echidna the only person who could possibly understand me?

Or, at the very least, understand his mentality.

Ryuzu: "Su-bo?"

Subaru: "...I think I understand Ryuzu-san's position now. And what Echidna was aiming for. So other than that, there's something else I wanted to ask... Were Echidna's plans successful?"

Ryuzu: "Her plans..."

Subaru: "Even I can see that she's readied the empty vessels. All that's left is to write herself into them. So, was she successful in copying herself? I mean..."

—Is Echidna currently alive somewhere in this world?

Subaru didn't say the question out loud.

But, understanding what he was trying to ask, Ryuzu closed her eyes and shook her head to Subaru's hopeful gaze.

Slowly, she shook her head.

Ryuzu: "No, regrettably not... The Witch's plans were not successful. There is no body of Ryuzu Meyer in existence which carries the Witch's personalities, tying her to the world of the living."

Subaru: "...Why's that? She couldn't suck the memories out of her head and download it into the body?"

Ryuzu: "I don't know what «download» is, but the actual technique for extracting her personality was complete. As for why it failed, there is another reason."

Subaru: "Another reason...?"

Ryuzu: "It's quite simple. There is a limit to how much content a vessel can hold before they begin to overflow. If just one part flows over, the rest could no longer be considered the original existence."

Hearing the word "vessel", Subaru looked at Ryuzu, and then at Pico. Gazing at their tiny bodies,

Subaru: "Vessel... It's probably not a problem with the body size, right?"

Ryuzu: "It is the size of the soul, you could say. People have souls of sizes that befit their existence. The vessel of the girl Ryuzu Meyer isn't large enough to contain the soul of the Witch Echidna."

Subaru: "But... How could you be sure?"

Ryuzu: "When she failed to inject her knowledge into the first of the replicants, the problem with the size of the vessel was already self-evident. But, by that time, Ryuzu Meyer's body was already sealed within the crystal, and the mechanism to replicate her body was already in motion... and so, though unable to fulfill their original purpose, the vessels continued to be born, one after another."

Subaru couldn't help but be surprised by the lack of foresight.

It was certainly uncharacteristic of Echidna to make this kind of a mistake. And failing to do anything about the ever-increasing number of Ryuzu afterwards just didn't sound like her at all.

Subaru: "So then, what happened to the first replicant? She couldn't hold everything, but she still inherited a part of the Witch's memories, right? It may be partial, but she's still more or less a copy of the Witch."

Ryuzu: "When you continue pouring liquid into an already full vessel, who can decide which parts are kept and which parts are left out? As long as it doesn't affect daily life, the loss of specific, trivial memories could still be salvageable, but what if more crucial portions are lost? The person would no longer be the same."

Listening to her roundabout explanation, Subaru imagined what the first copy of Ryuzu with Echidna's nature must have been like. Whatever she was, she must have strayed far from the Witch's expectations,

Ryuzu: "The story goes that the first of the replicants was completely broken mentally, and since she inherited a part of the Witch's power, she was also quite dangerous and troublesome to deal with. It took a great amount of effort to dispose of her, I hear."

Subaru: "Disposed of... Huh."

Ryuzu: "Of course, the Witch wasn't so irresponsible as to abandon everything after a single failure. After disposing of the first replicant, I hear that she went to great pains to think of a way to alter the volume of a soul so she could transfer herself into the next one."

Subaru: "Sounds like she was really putting her heart and soul into it..."

What Echidna must have considered was to convert the data into a different medium to compress its volume, and perhaps enlarging the storage space on the receiving end by eliminating any unnecessary content.

The fact that Subaru could see this was thanks to his familiarity with computers and the concept of data, but with no such foundations beforehand, not to mention that she was dealing with souls, it must be beyond incredible for Echidna to have thought of this.

Hearing about the loss of the first replicant, Subaru was honestly quite disappointed. But the fact that Echidna immediately moved onto another approach lifted his hopes once again.

However, seeing Subaru's reaction, Ryuzu continued, "But",

Ryuzu: "While she did find a new method, the Witch was never able to test it."

Subaru: "W—why not? Might be weird for me to say this, but aren't the grounds for the experiment ready to go? Even now, we still got a bunch of Ryuzu Meyer copies..."

Ryuzu: "Before the experiment could continue, the Witch of Envy had begun making her move."

Subaru: "———"

Ryuzu: “The Witch of Envy devoured half the world, and consumed all the other six Witches in the process. The Witch of Greed was no exception. And so, a Witch’s plan to attain immortality was cut short by the hands of another Witch.”

Subaru had an inkling about the fates of the other six Witches.

Echidna had told him in her Citadel of dreams, as well as let him personally meet them— though they were only lingering, ephemeral fragments of what the Witch of Envy had erased from the world.

Having failed to attain immortality, continuing to preserve their fragments in this world was perhaps Echidna’s final act of rebellion.

Subaru: “...So what happened to the Sanctuary after the Witch was gone?”

Ryuzu: “In the first place, this land was under the management of Ros-bo’s family, the House of Mathers. I don’t know what kind of Contract was sealed between the Witch and the House of Mathers, but it has continued to this day, and the Sanctuary is currently under Ros-bo’s care and management. That said, all Ros-bo’s really doing is ensuring a flow of supplies enough to ward off ruin, and occasionally bringing in some children who meet the Sanctuary’s criteria.”

Subaru: “And everything else is left in the care of Ryuzu-san... you said earlier that your individual personality was acquired little-by-little...”

Ryuzu: “Though I am one of the replicants, I was the third to be born. In order to fulfill the task of managing the Sanctuary and the ever-increasing number of Ryuzu Meyers, I was implanted with a certain degree of personality at birth. And even now, I am carrying out that duty.”

Subaru: “Implanting personalities... is that really possible?”

Implanting an empty vessel with simulated personality so that it could fulfill a role.

Not unlike giving a computer artificial intelligence so that it behaves like a human— which was still no more than a figment of the imagination in Subaru’s world. To this, Ryuzu nodded.

Ryuzu: “No doubt, it was not an easy task. It was only possible because I was a soulless and empty vessel. And even then, I could only perform some rudimentary tasks during the experimental stage.”

“I sure got off to a rough start”, her smile seemed to be saying.

Ryuzu: “Being given a role when you have no memories is certainly a strange feeling. The days would pass slowly, and yet things moved with incredible momentum. In time, even I grew to be perplexed by its mysteries.”

Subaru: “...So what happened to the rest of the replicants? I haven’t seen any in the Sanctuary other than Pico and Ryuzu-san.”

Ryuzu: “Other than the four of us fulfilling the role of Ryuzu, the others are scattered in various locations throughout the Sanctuary. They act like eyes watching for intruders, and serve as relays. Interestingly, we replicants can relay our thoughts with one another.”

Garfiel had once mentioned the Eyes of the Sanctuary. If he was referring to the Ryuzu-replicants keeping watch around the Sanctuary, then that would explain how he managed to see through the villagers’ evacuation so quickly. And, arriving on that thought,

Subaru: “W—wait hold on, you just said something I can’t let slide... What do you mean «the four of us filling the role of Ryuzu»?”

Ryuzu: “Hmm, that. It’s simple. Continually manifesting an entire body can be a tremendous burden on a replicant. This body will fade if my Mana runs out. And, unlike Spirits, I doubt I can re-materialize if I disappear completely. There may be a way to do it, but I don’t know of it.”

Disappearing and reforming with memories intact, Subaru remembered the Spirit whom he had seen do this many times before. Although, since Puck had somewhere to go home to every time he disappeared, strictly speaking, he wasn’t really disappearing. But since this wasn’t the case with the Ryuzu clones, disappearing from the depletion of Mana would mean death for that individual.

Ryuzu: “Each one of us cannot stay active for very long. Once our bodies reach their limits and could no longer move, it would take about three days to replenish the lost Mana. In the meantime, we need to make sure nothing inconvenient happens due to the absence of Ryuzu Meyer.”

Subaru: “So, there are four Ryuzu-sans...”

Ryuzu: “We take turns being Ryuzu Meyer for one day, every four days. Outside of that, I’d be the same as the other vessels... An empty cask wearing the facade of Ryuzu Meyer. That might be a way to describe it.”

Listening to Ryuzu’s somewhat cynical remarks, for a moment, Subaru didn’t know what to say.

Anything he could possibly say would come across as empty and frivolous here. Even knowing that silence would mean affirming Ryuzu’s cynicism, no words came to his lips.

Ryuzu: “Don’t feel bad, Su-bo. Me and the other replicants have each accepted our purpose. Same as the first Ryuzu Meyer.”

Subaru: “The first... That’s right, I wanted to ask about that too.”

Ryuzu: “Mn?”

Subaru: “I can see why Ryuzu-san and the other Ryuzu replicants would obey the Witch and protect the Sanctuary. But why did the girl Ryuzu Meyer help the Witch?”

A girl encased in a crystal, having all of eternity stolen from her.

Judging by the conversation so far, there didn’t seem to have been any attempts to fill the empty vessels with Ryuzu Meyer herself. So Ryuzu Meyer had sacrificed herself for the experiment, choosing for the residence of her soul to be forever sealed within a crystal.

In exchange, her body would continuously be reborn outside. Though, for her soul, her decision was akin to suicide.

Why would a little girl make such a decision?

Or perhaps the Witch haphazardly threw her on the experiment table without her consent?

While Subaru wished that it wasn’t the latter, he still asked this question,

Subaru: “What was Ryuzu Meyer thinking when she chose to participate in the experiment?”

Ryuzu: "...Ryuzu Meyer offered the Witch a condition, and the Witch accepted, so she participated in the experiment. That's what I heard. There's no need to worry, she wasn't forced."

Subaru: "A condition... Can you tell me what it was?"

Ryuzu: "Even if you hear it, I doubt you would understand it."

Hearing this, Subaru just wordlessly stared back at her. Seeing eyes like those of a stubborn child, Ryuzu frowned and exhaled a deep sigh.

Ryuzu: "Ryuzu Meyer's condition to the Witch was the Sanctuary's continued existence."

Subaru: "The Sanctuary's... continued existence?"

Ryuzu: "Ryuzu Meyer wished for the state of the Sanctuary, which the Witch created as her Experimental Grounds, to continue to be preserved. Of course, since the Witch needed the Sanctuary to continue her experiments, she gladly accepted. Even now, after the Witch's death, her promise to Ryuzu Meyer is kept. With our own hands, we see to it that the Contract is fulfilled."

Subaru: "No, but that's... the order's all backwards."

Echidna was the one who needed the Sanctuary for her experiments, and Ryuzu Meyer was the one gathered in the Sanctuary for those experiments. Why would a little girl placed on an experiment table ask the Witch for the Sanctuary's continued existence? The arrangement made no sense at all.

Ryuzu: "Even if it meant being used for experiments... It is still much cozier than a land in which they are persecuted. Don't you think so?"

Subaru: "...That just sounds a bit too far beyond saving."

Ryuzu: "And yet, she found salvation here. So Ryuzu Meyer offered herself for the experiment. Whether or not it achieved anything in the end, you can be the judge of that after seeing this girl and myself."

Ryuzu took a sip of her thoroughly cold tea. Subaru didn't say a word in reply.

Even as the topic of her circumstances came to an end, Pico showed no reaction at his side. Only, she was still silently holding onto his sleeve.

Subaru: “Why’s she so attached to me? I thought there’s nothing inside, and at first she was treating me like I don’t even exist.”

Ryuzu: “It’s because Su-bo touched Ryuzu Meyer’s crystal. The command right has been written to you.”

Subaru: “Command right...?”

Subaru furrowed his brows at the appearance of the new term.

And seeing this, Ryuzu nodded and held up a single finger with “Right”,

Ryuzu: “Go ahead, try giving her an order. Oh, but nothing indecent now. She looks exactly like me, after all.”

Subaru: “Even if you don’t say that, I’m not interested in loli body-types okay!? I only have a healthy attraction to girls my age! —Pico, rub my shoulders a little.”

Giving Ryuzu a pout, Subaru turned to Pico beside him. At the sound of his voice, the little girl looked up and affirmed his command with a nod. She climbed onto the bed, circled behind his back, and,

Subaru: “Ooh, oohoooh, feels nice feels nice... Ah? Wai—wait, Pico-san? That’s a bit too forceful? Scale it back scale it back... AWWW, no no, Pico-san, scale it baaaaaack!!”

Ryuzu: “She may know the concept of shoulder rubs, but the strength to put into it is still an unknown. This kind of thing can happen if we don’t take care to teach her properly.”

Subaru: “W-why’d you tell me to try then!?”

Squirming himself free of Pico’s shoulder-rub, Subaru ordered her back to her original position before giving his creaking shoulders a few turns. With the horror of Pico’s bone-crushing grip still fresh in his mind, Subaru tilted his head with “But, I mean”,

Subaru: “If just touching it transfers the command authority to me, isn’t the security a bit too lax? What if it’d been some malicious lolicon¹³¹?”

¹³¹ Someone that likes lolis (little girls) a little too much. If this is you, report yourself to the FBI.

Ryuzu: "It's nearly impossible to stumble into that place by accident, and the command authority doesn't transfer so easily. At the very least, you would have to be accepted as an apostle of Greed."

Subaru: "...Hmm?"

Listening to Ryuzu say this followed by a sip of tea, Subaru already couldn't count how many times he had been stumped in this conversation. Crossing his arms, he timidly let out an "Uhh...",

Subaru: "Excuse me. I don't remember becoming an apostle of Greed or anything."

Ryuzu: "Someone who has gained Echidna's approval is qualified to be an apostle. Did you receive anything while inside the Tomb? Given something, a gift, or took anything into your body?"

Subaru: "In the Tomb..."

Recalling his meeting with Echidna in her Citadel of dreams, Subaru tried to remember if there was some kind of solemn bestowment like what Ryuzu was talking about. But his search came up empty. If Echidna had granted him anything, it would've been some knowledge, some relief, and some terrifying experiences. And also,

Subaru: "...It couldn't have been the Dona Tea, right?"

Ryuzu: "Hmm, Dona Tea?"

Subaru: "Echidna said it's her body fluids which she cleverly dressed up as tea and gave to me, I wound up drinking it twice..."

Ryuzu: "No kidding, that's definitely it."

Subaru: "What did that bastard make me drink!!!?"

Seeing Subaru suddenly jump up in anger, Ryuzu chided him with "Now, now". But, seeing that Subaru had no intention of cooling down,

Ryuzu: "Be that as it may, it is the reason we got to where we are. So, it's not all bad, is it?"

Subaru: "It just pisses me off to have something put into me without me knowing! What the hell did she do to me? Apostle of Greed or whatever, I've already got my plates full with Witches as it is, don't go shoveling more on. Those damn Witches are all the same..."

Whether it was unknowingly sealing a Return by Death Contract with the Witch of Envy, or being one-sidedly declared an apostle of Greed, it's like the Witches just don't give a damn about other people.

Ryuzu: "Anyways, thanks to that, Su-bo has been given the command right over the Ryuzu replicants in the Sanctuary. You can even order me to obey you."

Subaru: "It even works on you, Ryuzu-san?"

Ryuzu: "While my willpower is stronger than the girl with no will of her own, ultimately, I cannot defy it. So, that must make a young boy like you very happy, no?"

Subaru: "I already said I'm not a lolicon..."

Even if she throws him a seductive gaze, he won't react or anything.

Peeking at Ryuzu's delightful smile through the corners of his eyes, Subaru could feel the Sanctuary's mysteries beginning to clear.

A hidden facility deep within the forest. Ryuzu Meyer sealed inside, and a system which replicates her body. The destruction that would take place six days from now, along with the problems that comes with it.

And then, there was something that could not be left out now that they were on the topic of the facility's existence——

Subaru: "Ryuzu-san, sorry it's so sudden, but... There's something I need your help with."

Ryuzu: "What? If it's something dirty, then you can go ask those pure 'n innocent ones instead of me."

Subaru: "Can you stop with that already!"

Shoving aside Ryuzu's jabs at the fact that he was going through puberty, Subaru stood up, stretched out his spine, and tilted back his head towards the ceiling.

Subaru: “This command right... there’s at least one other guy who’s got it, right?”

Ryuzu: “———”

Subaru: “There’re quite a few things I want to ask him, but there’s just something else that’s been bothering me.”

Two people surfaced in his mind.

One, whom he had seen issuing orders to the twenty-odd Ryuzu replicants— The great tiger, guardian of the Sanctuary, Garfiel.

And the other, was,

Subaru: “Why did her Door Crossing send me into the facility... It might be time to get the answer to that...”

It was about time he properly questioned that girl with cream-colored curls, Subaru decided.

Arc 4 Chapter 58 - Nana

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 12, Chapter 2 “I’ve Already Seen Hell”, Part 7 (heavily changed)

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken – [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#)

Coming out of the remote residence alongside Ryuzu and Pico, Subaru noticed a sliver of dawn beginning to creep onto the eastern sky, and felt sleepy for the first time that night.

Subaru: “Woah, the sun’ll be up soon... A whole lot has happened tonight, huh.”

It didn’t feel like it, but the night had begun with Emilia’s Trial, then Subaru’s Trial, a Return by Death, an after-Trials meeting, a run-in with Garfiel, and, after that, him uncovering a secret facility before spending the rest of the night learning the Sanctuary’s secrets from Ryuzu.

This dense use of time and the hyper-speed developments had left him dazed and out of breath. And, unlike his mind, he couldn’t quite hide the toll on his body, which had been running non-stop until now. One could say that the subtle imbalance of mental and physical fatigue was just one of the downsides of Return by Death.

Subaru: “Honestly, I kinda wanna go back to the cathedral and sleep till noon...”

Ryuzu: “No one would mind if you do. I plan on taking a nice long rest as well after I pass things on to the next Ryuzu.”

Subaru: “While I sort of envy the kind of shift-rotations you have, I’m running out of time, so there’s no helping it...”

Six days— Or actually, only five, since a day had already passed. And considering that he’d have to spend a whole day’s travel time to get to and from the mansion, there was really only three days he could use.

Wasting a precious half of a day sleeping wasn't something he could afford, but, while Echidna already knew that Subaru could see the future, he was still hesitant about whether he should tell Ryuzu.

Subaru: "It might make the Witch of Envy show up, so better not just yet..."

Sweat popped up on his forehead the moment the shadowy, Sanctuary-devouring Witch flashed across his mind.

Somehow, he just knew that the devastation was a result of him running his mouth in Echidna's Citadel. Spilling forbidden knowledge out of reach of the Witch's constraints, he had invited her wrath as well as everything that followed.

So, he'd consider it lucky if the Witch only dealt him the usual punishment in the real world, where she could directly lay her hands on him—

Subaru: "I do wanna try, but out of concern for other people's lives... better not."

Deciding this in a deflated mumble, Subaru looked down at the dopey-looking Pico, standing there holding his left hand. On the receiving end of his gaze, as if in anticipation of another command, the girl's round eyes grew even rounder.

It seems that Subaru's first command had made her more aware of the transfer of the command right. And now, Pico was like a baby bird looking up to its parent.

Ryuzu: "So, what does Su-bo plan to do next?"

Subaru: "Probably get back to the mansion for now. There's someone there I need to get some answers from... And I'll see Frederica while I'm at it. There's a whole bunch of things she could clear up for me."

Ryuzu: "Frederica, huh..."

Mentioning the name of the hulking maid who popped into his mind, he saw a furrow in Ryuzu's brows, as if there was some significance in hearing Subaru mention this name. After all, it wasn't like Ryuzu to react this way.

Subaru: "Did that remind you of something? About Frederica?"

Ryuzu: "...No, it's nothing important."

Subaru: "Ryuzu-san, I'd rather not use my command right if possible... I really don't want to have to order Ryuzu-san to tell me."

Subaru shrunk up his shoulders, imploring her to tell him. But, underneath the words, his eyes sharpened as if clearly saying, "I'll use it if I have to". Seeing this, Ryuzu let out a sigh.

Ryuzu: "It was just that, ever since Frederica left, little-by-little, it feels like the Sanctuary's gears have been slipping out of place."

Subaru: "Slipping out of place?"

Ryuzu: "The way it was, though I'm not sure if you could call it healthy... hm, whether it was the residents, the Ryuzu Meyer replicants, or Gar-bo, none of them were as on edge as they are now."

Subaru: "..."

Ryuzu: "You know, Su-bo, I have great expectations of you."

As Subaru fell silent, Ryuzu looked up and said this.

Expectations. He felt a tug on his chest as he heard it. Because the word reminded him of—

Ryuzu: "For the longest time, the Sanctuary had been awkwardly serving a purpose which it had already lost. That obstinance is now creating holes all over. That's why I have great expectations of you, Su-bo."

Subaru: "What, could I..."

Ryuzu: "The Witch's obsession, the reasons for the Sanctuary's continued existence, and Ryuzu Meyer's wish. I look forward to seeing you bring about a conclusion that fulfills everyone's hopes in the end."

A far-too-heavy burden of bearing everyone's expectations on his shoulders.

Subaru had the urge to immediately say "Can't do it". But, sensing Ryuzu's solemn gaze,

Subaru: "———"

The words just stuck in his throat.

Ryuzu: “This is good. For now... it’s good enough.”

Seeing Subaru’s hesitation and reluctance, as if understanding it all, Ryuzu nodded her head.

Her appearance was no older than a child’s, but it was in moments like this that Subaru understood that she possessed qualities befitting her age.

Ryuzu: “It seems, my time is almost up.”

Leaving these words with a tinge of regret, Ryuzu’s body began to glow with a faint light.

It reminded him of a Spirit on the verge of vanishing, he thought, as he reached out his fingers to her, but,

Ryuzu: “Don’t worry. I’m not returning to Mana just yet. I’m just going to sleep for a while until I save up the expended Mana again. There will be a Ryuzu to replace me soon.”

Subaru: “But... even if your face and voice are all the same, you won’t be the same, right?”

Ryuzu: “I suppose you’re right. The looks and tone and personality are meant to be similar... but we’re still different people. So, only this old self chatting with Su-bo right now is actually me. Does that make you feel lonely?”

Subaru: “It’s not whether I feel lonely or not. Ryuzu-san... Ryuzu-san, don’t you feel sad? Aren’t you upset that there are four people taking turns pretending to be Ryuzu Meyer? Don’t you ever wonder where your own life...”

Caught mid-sentence, Subaru realized just how cruel his questions were.

Even if Ryuzu herself thought this way, even if she truly suffered and grieved over her circumstances, Subaru knew full well that there was nothing he could do about it.

He had no grasp of arcane principles, detailed knowledge of Mana, or even the most superficial understanding of magical algorithms. So what was the point of reaching out to these unreachable regrets?

Ryuzu seemed to understand his conflicting thoughts. She gave him a faint smile as her pink hair swayed in the wind, tinted by the colors of dawn.

Ryuzu: “What do you think, Su-bo?”

Subaru: “—Huh?”

Ryuzu: “The answer to that question... is just another one of the things I will eagerly expect from you.”

Leaving this behind, like a thin haze, Ryuzu’s body melted into the morning light.

No different from a scattering mist, impossible to believe even with the warning beforehand, it was like a scene pulled straight from a dream. A living person simply vanished into the dawn.

Although she told him that she wouldn’t cease to exist, he found it hard to take her at her word.

But, in that same instant, the shape of another person appeared where Ryuzu had vanished. Whether it was stature or appearance, every last detail was identical to the Ryuzu who disappeared. She shook her head once and looked up at Subaru,

Ryuzu: “I shouldn’t think I need to reintroduce myself, Su-bo. The previous me has filled me in all about you.”

As if to clear up Subaru’s doubts, with that, the new Ryuzu updated their mutual understanding. And, at the very end, the girl tilted her head,

Ryuzu: “So, Su-bo... what will you do first?”

Subaru: “Ah, right...”

He lifted his head.

Watching the light of dawn erode away the night’s sky, his thoughts slipped to the time that had passed, as well as the time that still remained to him. Then his eyes dropped to Ryuzu and Pico, and,

Subaru: “First thing is to get out of the Sanctuary. I’ll need some help from Ryuzu-sans for that.”

And just like this, Subaru submitted his request.

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Subaru arrived at the stable just after the break of dawn.

Pushing open the creaking gate as quietly as he could, he searched for his partner inside, and found the jet-black figure blending into the darkness in the back of the stable, awaiting her master's call.

Subaru: "Sorry for cooping you up in here, Patrasche."

Hearing Subaru's voice, Patrasche reached out her head and nudged him with her nose. Her gesture was at once filled with affection and carrying a tinge of complaint at being left aside for so long, prompting a ticklish feeling inside Subaru's heart.

Subaru: "I know you just woke up, but I need your help. Can you take me back to the mansion?"

Holding her face up to Subaru's palms, Patrasche snorted, as if to say "What am I going to do with you, Subaru-kun...".

Sighing with relief that at least his dragon was on board with his plan, Subaru untied Patrasche's reins from the stable and prepared to bring her outside.

Without other encumbrances weighing her down, the usual half-day ride might be completed in even less. If they set out in the morning like this, they should reach the mansion just before dusk.

Subaru: "Just a messy plan assuming I'll start over anyway..."

This time, Subaru was determined to return to the mansion, and, unlike the loops before this, he wasn't going to bring the villagers. Frankly, it was because he was convinced that he would be doing it all again and had resolved to eliminate all unnecessary variables aside from the goal of gathering information.

The loss of the friendship he had struck up with Ryuzu would be regrettable, but,

Subaru: "My relationship with Garfiel is already as horrible as can be, and I'm just about to make it even worse..."

Having transferred the command right to himself— Subaru could just imagine Garfiel seething with bloodshot eyes, looking for whoever took it.

It probably wouldn't take long before he finds him. After all, Subaru didn't order Ryuzu to keep it a secret, so Ryuzu herself would tell the truth if she was asked.

All this was within Subaru's considerations.

Subaru: “—Still, can't help but worry about leaving Emilia with just a note.”

If this world was only a sacrifice to be erased as soon as it was rewound, then logically, his concerns for Emilia in this world shouldn't even exist. No matter how much she suffers, grieves, or otherwise rejoices, all of it will be lost along with the world itself. But, even though his mind understood this,

Subaru: “It's still no excuse at all...”

Even knowing that this was a soon-to-be-abandoned world, Subaru still didn't want to make Emilia cry.

Finding out that he had left without a word would likely bring her more pain than she could bear. Losing the only support she could lean on, she probably wouldn't know what to do with herself. While a part of him was glad that Emilia relied on him like this, it still hurt all the same.

In order to make sure that doesn't happen, or at least hoping that it wouldn't last too long if it did, Subaru left her a note.

That said, there was nothing special written inside, only an assortment of run-of-the mill words of consolation. Since he couldn't tell her the truth, it was all he could do to try to keep her from worrying.

Subaru: “It's better than nothing... Wait, what if Emilia doesn't actually need me that much?”

Ever since Puck went missing, Emilia had been relying on Subaru more than ever before.

So that thought was only wishful thinking, and he knew it couldn't be as simple as that.

In any case, Subaru must leave the Sanctuary and leave Emilia behind. In order to rewrite the unsalvageable present with a future that could yet be saved, he would have to harden his heart and make the necessary sacrifices.

Subaru: “Before anyone notices, let’s... Oh?”

While leading Patrasche out of the stables, Subaru picked up the saddle he had stored away in the carriage. Giving it a light pat, he threw it over Patrasche, when he caught something in the corner of his vision. It was,

Subaru: “Petelgeuse’s Gospel...?”

A thick book in black binding, hidden away in the corner of the carriage.

Once belonging to Petelgeuse, honestly, Subaru had wanted to get rid of it, but he couldn’t exactly hand it off to other people. Besides, he figured it might reveal some useful information about the obscure Witch Cult, and so ended up keeping it.

Subaru: “Come to think of it, that view’s kinda changed after what Roswaal said.”

After fitting on the saddle, Subaru casually picked up the Gospel.

Feeling its dense weight in his palm, the image of the blood-drenched madman surfaced in his mind.

A man with an overzealous devotion to the Gospel, believing that it was his only way to express his loyalty to the Witch. Inside, like some poor parody, its pages hinted at its owner Petelgeuse’s future actions.

Subaru: “Roswaal, Beatrice, and Petelgeuse... Why’re they so convinced that only they could read this thing...?”

Grumbling, he casually flipped through its pages.

But suddenly, his fingers froze, as a strange, strangled noise escaped his throat—

Subaru: “I can, read it?”

—When he realized that he could read the words written on the Gospel’s white pages.

Although the letters were something like a child’s scrawling, they lined up to form words that carried meaning. What was more, those words were in the form of Yi-glyphs that Subaru could understand.

Subaru: “How could... Unless, it’s recognized me as its owner? But I didn’t do anything to...”

At that thought, Subaru suddenly noticed something.

The last time he tried and failed to read this Gospel's contents was before he came to the Sanctuary. It had been in the Capital, and after returning to Roswaal's mansion. Since then, he hadn't had a chance to open the Gospel to check, but it could only be related to something that took place in the Sanctuary.

Although, the direct cause might be something that didn't exactly happen in the Sanctuary. Namely,

Subaru: "What the hell did Echidna do to me...?"

Just like the Trials inside the Tomb, there was a good chance that Echidna had tampered with his physical body in some way. He had a feeling that it had something to do with the tea Echidna gave him at her so-called tea party.

Echidna was joking about it being her bodily fluids, but what if it was something else?

Something that drastically changed Subaru's body from before.

Subaru: "Actually, I don't know if that's the reason, considering all that's happened last loop."

It could have just as easily been caused by the Witch of Envy's wrath after he revealed Return by Death to Echidna.

Subaru hated the fact that he couldn't go there and ask her this very moment.

Subaru: "...Then again, it might not have accepted me as its owner after all."

Being recognized by a Gospel belonging to the Witch Cult doesn't exactly put one's mind at ease, but, after quickly scanning over its contents, Subaru determined that all the messages were meant for Petelgeuse.

Since it was undated, Subaru couldn't tell when the events of the first entry took place. But from the Gospel's page after page of scribbled accounts, a picture of Petelgeuse's activities began to take shape.

The entries were basically "where to go" and "what to do" but contained no description of what would happen as a result. Perhaps Petelgeuse had no interest in the outcomes, and merely improvised the rest by doing whatever he thought benefited the Witch Cult.

Reading on like this, he came to the final entry.

Though there were more pages after it, they were all blank after this point. On the final page, there were still the crimson words which Subaru had scrawled in blood— “THE END”.

Before that, was the Gospel’s last original entry.

Subaru: “«In the Mathers’ domain, Trial on silver-haired half-devil»... Huh. What’s that supposed to mean?”

Without knowing what the Trials would entail, Subaru could gather no information aside from that Petelgeuse was to attack Emilia.

Nonetheless, Subaru had managed to confirm that Petelgeuse’s atrocities were indeed committed in accordance to the Gospel’s instructions.

Subaru: “...Right, my bad my bad. Let’s get going.”

Watching Subaru lean against the carriage, Patrasche gave him a few impatient nudges with her snout. Giving her a wry smile, Subaru placed the Gospel back in its original spot in the carriage.

Consigning what he had just witnessed into memory, his mind began drifting onto other concerns.

Specifically, escaping the Sanctuary and returning to the mansion.

Subaru: “Hopefully we can get out without causing a stir in the Sanctuary. So take it nice and quiet, ok?”

Patrasche: “———Nghh!!”

As Subaru climbed onto her saddle, Patrasche let out a high-spirited neigh in response to her master’s request.

Getting the feeling that his partner didn’t understand his request at all, Subaru calmed the overexcited Patrasche and set the course straight for the edge of the Sanctuary.

He could already begin to see the sun's true form in the distant, eastern sky, showering its light upon the tops of the forest canopy. If he doesn't hurry, the early risers will soon be up, making his flight far more difficult without the cover of night.

Just as Subaru tried to carefully give Patrasche a signal to accelerate, Patrasche broke into a sprint. The Divine Protection of Wind Evasion activated around the ground dragon's body, shielding Subaru from the turbulence and the wind.

Shooting out of the Sanctuary, they entered the forest. Following paths that were no wider than animal trails, Patrasche unhesitatingly galloped in the direction of the mansion. Same as always, though Subaru was holding the reins, Patrasche navigated by her own volition, choosing the paths she believed to be best for her master.

Though it made him feel a tinge of loneliness, there was nothing else to do except to leave it to Patrasche's discretion. Grasping tightly onto the reins, Contracting the muscles of his body, they merged into a single shadow speeding through the forest. If nothing stands in the way, they should come out of the forest within an hour, leaving the bounds of the Sanctuary behind them. But,

Garfiel: "Just... Hold'on a goddamn minute, OY!!"

A heel slamming down from above shot into the surface of the earth, shattering the ground in a violent blast.

Patrasche gouged her claws into the soil to brake in front of the upheaval of dust and timber. To prevent Subaru from flying off her back, she shifted her weight with supernatural dexterity before coming to a full stop, glaring at the path ahead.

At the same time, enduring the shock on Patrasche's back, Subaru turned his gaze to the same direction.

Garfiel: "You... What the fuck were you thinking, th'hell were you planning, hah? OY!"

Boiling rage flushing onto his face, Garfiel kicked his foot into the ground.

Crumpling his nose, with frustration and displeasure in full display, he bared his fangs at Subaru, who was looking down at him from Patrasche's back,

Garfiel: “Don’t fuckin’ look down on me, get down. Come to th’same eye-level n’speak. Get started or I crush ya, y’bastard...”

Subaru: “I had a feeling you’d get in the way, Garfiel.”

Garfiel: “And I never thought y’d do somethin’ this fuckin’ stupid! Y’tthink y’can turn tail ‘n run? Don’t make me laugh! You! Th’Sanctuary! Th’half-devil n’Roswaal! Everyone! Yer all in the same fuckin’ lot! ‘Til the fuckin’ Trials is done, no one gets out...”

Subaru: “Is that your excuse?”

Garfiel: “———”

Garfiel’s expression, flustered with rage, suddenly changed in front of Subaru’s concise question.

His seething glare sharpened while the intermittent sound of clenching teeth broke through his silent breaths.

Subaru: “Garfiel, you act like you want to keep us in the Sanctuary, and want us to complete the Trials... but that’s not what you really feel, is it?”

Garfiel: “Th’fuck’s that supposed to mean, oy.”

Subaru: “Doesn’t mean a thing. If you really hope to liberate the Sanctuary, you should let me do what I have to do. But you won’t, and you can’t, not yet, because there are more complicated factors at play. Am I wrong?”

Garfiel: “Hah, don’t give me that bullshit. I just can’t stand y’reekin of th’Witch’s stench without doin’ somethin’ ab...”

Subaru: “You... can’t really smell the Witch’s stench on me, can you?”

Once again, Garfiel fell speechless in front of Subaru’s question.

His eyes swam and his lips began to quiver. Truly a man who couldn’t hide his heart. Seeing his reaction, Subaru smiled bitterly, and,

Subaru: “What’s really been bothering me was when I came out of the Tomb last night. Honestly, at that moment, I thought you were going to kill me before I’d even have a chance, but you didn’t.”

Garfiel: “...Hah? Th’fuck’re y’talkin’ about?”

Subaru: “You don’t know what I mean? I’m starting to have doubts about whether you’ve been lying about that sharp nose of yours.”

It was immediately following Returning by Death, after dying from contact with the Witch, no less.

Even though Subaru must have been soaked to the bone in the Witch’s Lingering Scent, Garfiel’s attitude towards him didn’t change at all. Yet, not long after they parted, he came back to confront Subaru as if he had just remembered it, leading to their exchange last night— It was just all too unnatural.

Subaru: “Maybe you didn’t want to escalate the situation so you pretended not to notice, that was what I thought at the time... but, considering your straightforward personality, I had to rule out that possibility.”

Garfiel: “Y’re getting pretty far with yer conceited speculations. Y’tthink I’m lyin’ ‘bout smellin’ the Witch’s stench on ya? Hah, how fuckin’ stupid is that!? Why th’hell would I lie about somethin’ like that, oy? What’s the point o’...”

Subaru: “Of course there’s a point. By claiming this, you’re drawing all the suspicion to yourself... and diverting attention away from the actual person with the sharp nose.”

Garfiel: “———”

That single statement must have struck the heart of Garfiel’s true intentions.

The moment he heard it, Garfiel’s face contorted in the truest sense of the word. His willingness to resolve matters through dialogue up to now was suddenly replaced by one of violence and impulse.

Garfiel’s arms swelled, doubling in thickness. Golden fur began to cover his exposed skin as his slouching back hunched even deeper, ever closer to standing on all fours.

Garfiel: “I’ve heard enough of yer prattlin’. Looks like y’know somethin’ y’shouldn’t. I’d have avoided it if I could, but looks like I can’t let y’live.”

Subaru: “Don’t say that, Garfiel. You might want to hear me out for a little longer. Otherwise, you won’t know how your secrets got leaked, right?”

Garfiel: “My secrets...?”

Stared down by Subaru’s intensified glare, Garfiel let slip a voice of doubt.

To wipe away Garfiel’s disbelief, Subaru lifted his arm atop Patrasche’s back, and gave a loud snap of his fingers. Then,

Garfiel: “A, ah?”

Garfiel groaned, doubting the sight before his eyes.

On the other end of his vision, at Subaru’s beckon, one by one, Ryuzu Meyer copies emerged from the tree line, gathering around the ground dragon until there was twenty-one in all.

Personally restaging the scene he had once witnessed before, Subaru pointed his finger towards Garfiel,

Subaru: “Now that you’ve seen it, do you more or less understand my position here?”

Garfiel: “How... How th’hell did y’find that place!”

Subaru: “Using regret and pain as the sacrifice, I’ve summoned the truth. Now, it’s my turn.”

Raising his palm to the sky, Subaru looked down at the defeated Garfiel from atop his dragon.

On the receiving end of his gaze, Garfiel’s throat froze, as if unable to come to terms with the reality of having been beaten.

Subaru: “The command right has transferred to me. So that you wouldn’t notice, I told them to follow your orders for the rest of the night.”

Garfiel: “—Ah.”

Subaru: “But there’s no need to hide it anymore. Listen up, Garfiel. I am going to leave the Sanctuary and head back to the mansion. There are things I have to do. So I can’t have you getting in the way.”

Just now realizing the implications of Subaru's order, Garfiel's expression collapsed.

The firm determination of moments ago had melted from his face, and, in its place, was only an expression of weakness and confusion like that of a lost child.

His body's beastification had ceased, and the swollen figure shrank back to its original, scrawny form.

Subaru: "Don't follow, Garfiel. There's a mountain of things I want to ask you as well, but it's best if we leave it till later. The command authority too, there're way too many things I need to ask you."

Garfiel: "Quit... quit jokin' around. Y'think I'm gonna give up that easily...?"

Subaru: "You will. Deep down, you're just that soft."

At Subaru's provocation, Garfiel leaped forth with a roar. Baring his fangs, his momentum seemed to be set on crushing Subaru and Patrasche in a single strike. But there, a tiny figure stepped in between them.

A replicant. Garfiel swung his arm as if to swipe her away to clear the path of advance or else run her over. But, just before his arm made contact,

Ryuzu: "—Gar-bo."

Garfiel: "—!?"

Being called by his nickname, Garfiel's expression changed once more, as he reined in his arm at the last moment to strike at empty air. And, just like this, Garfiel's body was caught mid-flight by a multitude of hands, pulling him to the ground without resistance.

The replicants reached out all over Garfiel's body and held him under total restraint. Then, standing above Garfiel's despondent face, looking down,

Ryuzu: "Now, is that enough of a head start, Su-bo?"

Subaru: "Yeah, thanks for the help. I don't think Garfiel ever expected something like this."

During their battle against the Witch of Envy, Garfiel never hesitated in using the replicants as sacrificial pawns in his attack. But back then, there was no conscious Ryuzu Meyer at the scene. The active Ryuzu

at the time must have already been swallowed by the Witch's shadow, but Subaru suspected that there might be another reason as well.

With a calculation that could be said to be beyond cruel,

Subaru: "You can't treat the Ryuzu you see as family the same way you treat the other replicants. If there's a difference between how you and I use the control right, that would be it."

Garfiel: "YOU MOTHERFU—!!!!"

Subaru: "But, even if not for that, you still couldn't destroy Ryuzu Meyer replicants with your own hands, right? So, be good and let me off this time. It could be worse."

Garfiel: "How can it get worse than it already is! Quit fuckin' with me, y'quit fuckin' with me!"

Hearing the barks echo out into the horizon, Subaru consciously ignored it as he gave Patrasche a few taps on her back. Sensing Subaru's intention, the ground dragon gave a little snort, turned her back to the restrained Garfiel, and headed for the bounds of the forest.

Before leaving, Subaru turned back to Ryuzu, and,

Subaru: "I made you do something disagreeable, sorry about that."

Ryuzu: "I can tell that it must be necessary. As unpleasant as it is, I wouldn't have refused. There's no need to worry about me."

Subaru: "Still, sorry."

Subaru left this apology as Ryuzu turned to Garfiel with a look of sympathy. With that as his farewell, he signaled Patrasche to get going.

Once again, with the activation of the Divine Protection, all noise and wind were left behind them.

Garfiel: "Wait! Stop! You fucker! Quit fuckin' around, oy!!"

The distant voice hounded Subaru's trail.

As if to shake off its pursuit, Patrasche accelerated once more, carrying Subaru through the forest and out of the Sanctuary.

Garfiel: “Let go! Y’can’t let that guy outside... why, whywhywhy! Granny y’rather take that guy’s side than mine? Why, just why...”

Ryuzu: “———”

Garfiel: “NANAAAAAAAAA——!!!!”

A wail, as if at a loved one’s betrayal, resounded through the forest.

Leaving it and all else behind him, Subaru kept his course amidst the passing trees.

Necessary sacrifices, and necessary sorrows, all werestepping stones towards the perfect future.

Biting down on the corner of his lips and feeling blood trickling out of the gash, Subaru wrote off Garfiel’s despair as another sacrifice.

Arc 4 Chapter 59 - Sweet Pastries and Unsweet Stories

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 12, Chapter 3 “A Four-Hundred-Year-Old Cry”, Parts 1-2

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#)

Frederica: “...It seems you’ve returned earlier than I thought.”

Standing in the opened doorway with keen, widened eyes, the tall maid welcomed Subaru’s return in a soft whisper.

Subaru: “Yeah, we ran into a situation, so I had to come back. It’s only been two... no, three days, right? Sorry I couldn’t give you a heads up about coming back so soon, but can I come in now?”

Panting heavily on Patrasche’s back, Subaru answered with the fatigue of half a day’s travel behind him. Seeing Subaru still joking around despite his disheveled appearance, the maid— Frederica placed a hand over her lips to cover the fangs showing through her smile,

Frederica: “Certainly. It would be an affront to my duty as the Master’s servant to fail to provide a guest with the utmost hospitality. I will take the ground dragon to the stable, Subaru-sama, please come in. Petra will attend to your needs.”

Subaru: “Oh you don’t have to... No I mean, thanks please.”

Hopping down from Patrasche, his knees gave way at the landing. Though he managed to stave off falling by hanging onto the reins, it seems that he was more exhausted than he thought.

It was only natural— having rushed all the way from the Sanctuary without rest, after being awake all night, no less.

Despite the Divine Protection of Wind Evasion and Patrasche’s care not to add to the burden of her rider, the six hours’ journey had taken its toll on Subaru.

Noticing that his body had endured more than he realized, Subaru quickly took Frederica up on her offer. Handing the reins to Frederica, he patted the worried Patrasche on the back,

Subaru: “It’s alright, I’ll be fine. You’re the one I should thank for putting up with me all this way. It’s time to head to the stable and get a nice brushing, ok?”

Unlike horses, ground dragons’ bodies aren’t coated in fur, but they still seem to enjoy having their rigid scales cleaned with a brush. Patrasche was no exception, and excitedly nudged Subaru with her snout at his promise. Being frontally assaulted like this, Subaru let out an “Uwa!” and slinked back.

Frederica: “My, my, you sure are enthusiastic about this. Come with me, Patrasche-chan. I’ll make you a brand-new bed of straw.”

Subaru: “I’ll leave her with you, then— Hey, Frederica.”

Frederica: “Yes?”

Leading Patrasche by her reins, Frederica was walking her to the stable when Subaru called from behind. Stopping in her steps, Frederica looked back.

With her long, golden hair swaying, her vicious-looking features nonetheless carried a certain tenderness about them. Subaru gave the bones in his neck a crack, and,

Subaru: “—Do you have any plans to head to the cabin in the mountains today?”

Frederica: “...? No, I don’t, is something the matter?”

Hearing Subaru’s quiet question, Frederica replied in an incredulous tone. Taking note of the way she answered, of her expression, and her gaze, Subaru shook his head with “No”,

Subaru: “If not, then nevermind. Also, sorry to ask this, but, once you’re done with Patrasche, can you head back inside as soon as possible? There’re quite a few things about the Sanctuary I need to talk to you about.”

Frederica: “I understand. I will come back right away.”

Leaving him with an impeccable bow, Frederica led Patrasche away.

Watching her from the steps of the mansion, Subaru stretched his body on the spot and lifted his gaze—at the mansion in its unchanged majesty. This was the earliest he had ever returned to it.

The latest was the sixth night, and the earliest was the fourth.

One way or another, the blade that heralds the end would come. But before that—

Subaru: “Before that end comes, I’ll find the way to stop it.”

There had been too many sacrifices in this loop.

But even as he grieves for the world that will be lost, Subaru must strive to acquire something of equal value in return.

For Garfiel’s wails, and for Emilia’s unseen sorrow,

Natsuki Subaru had been granted the resolve to continue the fight and turn his eyes away from the pain.

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Petra: “Waa! You’re back so soon!”

The first words that welcomed Subaru as he entered the mansion was Petra’s adorably beaming greeting.

Though the literal content of her words were more-or-less the same as Frederica’s, the amount of affection instilled within them were of an entirely different weight-class.

Petra: “You look tired, are you alright? I mean, would you be feeling alright? I can prepare the bath right away, if you would like to... What’s wrong?”

Subaru: “No no, I just felt totally healed when I saw Petra. Come to think of it, you’re the only one I could say exactly what comes to mind to without having to worry about anything.”

Getting her polite and casual forms all mixed up, Petra excitedly circled around Subaru.

Subaru reached out his hand and patted her on her chestnut-colored hair, and she made a delighted squeal that was just way too adorable. Indeed, it was healing in the truest sense of the word.

Yet, almost simultaneously, the events of his last visit to the mansion flashed across his mind, along with Petra's gruesome fate in the end.

Subaru: "Petra, it's a bit sudden, but... can you listen to a request of mine?"

Petra: "...? Mm. Okay. I'll do anything Subaru-sama asks of me, no matter what."

Subaru: "T'haha, that's reassuring. Alright. It's something important. Frederica will be back soon as well, so let's talk in the lounge. Can you get some tea ready?"

Petra: "Frederica-oneesama will be there too?"

Subaru: "Yeah. It'll be determining what happens from here on, and it's not unrelated to Petra, either. So I want you there as well."

Petra: "Not unrelated, to me...?"

Covering her lips, Petra looked like she was sinking into thought. Then, as if suddenly realizing something, her face jumped up, blushing,

Petra: "So, it's about something super important involving me and Subaru-sama?"

Subaru: "Ummm, I guess you could say that? It's definitely important for both Petra and for me. Either way, it's not something we can decide just between ourselves."

Petra: "But, the feelings of the people involved are really important, right?"

Subaru: "Feelings? The feelings? Feelings are... well, also pretty important? It's true that it won't work if everyone's on different frequencies, so... yeah that too, I guess?"

Seeing Subaru nodding to her questions, Petra's face lit up as she did a spin on the spot. Then, running into the mansion almost dancing,

Petra: "Right away! I'll be back right away! Don't you run away!"

Subaru: "I'm not running anywhere... Petra, if you go too fast, you'll trip."

Watching Petra fly up the stairs, aiming straight for the maid's room, Subaru suddenly remembered something and called out to her from behind,

Subaru: "Petra, thanks for the handkerchief. It was probably not in the way you intended, but it really helped."

Petra: "Really? I helped Subaru?"

Subaru: "Yeah, saved my life... Well, not exactly, but feels like that."

Subaru pulled out the white embroidered handkerchief that Petra had given him as a gift.

It was the weapon he used to kill himself in the previous loop at the end of his showdown with the Witch of Envy, moments before he could be swallowed. That particular functionality was no doubt Echidna's doing, but it still began with Petra's feelings for him.

Come to think of it, if Echidna's will had stayed in effect, the handkerchief might still be a weapon even now. Maybe it could activate when the same conditions are met, when Subaru's life is in danger, or when some magical incantation injects it with Mana. Granted, the last one would be a bit too hard for Subaru.

Subaru: "Still, it's all thanks to you. I have to repay you for this gift somehow."

Petra: "Then, a *dayt*! One *dayt*!"

Subaru: "Um, did you hear that from Emilia?"

A first date with Emilia in Arlam Village was Subaru's reward for quelling the Wolgarms in the forest. Back then, the perceptive villagers and children had decided to leave Subaru and Emilia to themselves, and it seems Petra still remembered it.

Subaru: "Understood. Then allow me to be your escort. It would be my honor and privilege to be the partner of Petra's first date."

Petra: "You promise!"



Illustration from Volume 12, coloring by DdukaE ([source](#))

Subaru: “Yeah, promise.”

Happily holding up her hand with a blooming smile, Petra bounded into the hallway.

Watching the back of her tiny figure disappear into the hall, Subaru’s thoughts drifted to what her future might hold. A lovely girl with a bright future ahead of her. In five, no, three years’ time, she would have grown into a beautiful girl.

By that time, she would have probably forgotten about her feelings for him. But the fact that such a girl chose him as her first date still filled Subaru with a sinful sense of satisfaction. So,

Subaru: “I’ll be sure to make good on that promise, Petra.”

She won’t remember the promise they exchanged in this collapsing world.

But Subaru will always carry the fact of its passing. When he has finally chosen the perfect future, he will make that promise to her again.

With the lingering thought of Petra’s smile in his mind, Subaru directed his steps to the lounge.

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Seated on a sofa in the lounge, Subaru smiled wryly at Petra, sitting across from him pouting with her face all red.

Swinging her legs from the edge of the sofa, Petra made no effort to hide her displeasure as the introduction drew to a close. Seeing Subaru smiling at the girl’s demeanor, the older maid sitting beside her couldn’t help but put in a word or two,

Frederica: “Why are you making that face, Petra? It’s rude to do so in front of Subaru-sama.”

Petra: “But, but, Frederica-oneesama...”

Frederica: “No buts. Even if you’re well acquainted with each other, it’s no excuse to be rude. If you don’t keep that in mind on a daily basis, how will you remember it on important occasions? You’re a clever child, but you have to be more careful about these things.”

Petra: “Uuuuuu

Petra despondently chewed her lips and lowered her head.

Finding it a bit hard to watch the girl being scolded, Subaru tried to calm things down with “That’s alright, that’s alright...”, but instantly gave up when Frederica shot him a glare.

After joining up with Frederica, who was returning from the stable, and Petra, as she finished brewing the tea, the three of them took their seats in the lounge and began the vital conversation.

And now, Petra was currently sulking about Subaru’s opening words. The content of which was,

Petra: “Why do I have to leave the mansion? I’ve only been here for a week and...”

Watching Petra tear up like she was going to cry, Subaru was stricken by pangs of guilt. But, considering the calamities that will soon befall the mansion, he couldn’t very well keep her around out of guilt.

So Subaru steeled his heart and shook his head,

Subaru: “I don’t mean having you leave the mansion forever. We aren’t letting you go, just having you stay in the village for a week... I just want you to stay at home until then.”

Frederica: “And you can’t say why, is that right?”

Subaru: “...Not in detail. But it’s a fact that there’s danger coming to the mansion. Frederica, you know about the Witch Cult attack not long ago, right?”

Witch Cult. Frederica’s expression darkened as she heard the words.

While she was away, the Witch Cultists led by Petelgeuse had attacked the mansion and Arlam Village. That was only two weeks ago.

Having grown up in the Sanctuary, Frederica must have been well aware of the unwanted attention that Emilia's identity as a half-elf attracted, and how it ultimately led to this attack.

Just as Subaru expected, Frederica's face took on a complicated expression as she nodded,

Frederica: "If that is true, then Subaru-sama's decision would be most appropriate. After all, you still don't have any way to protect yourself, Petra."

Petra: "But that's ok! Subaru will protect me!"

Subaru: "Even though I kinda wanna say «Leave it to me!» like a man, I'm way too aware of how weak and incompetent I am, so I won't say anything like that."

Even as Petra stood up to object, her childish objection was immediately undermined by Subaru's self-admitted uselessness. Petra dejectedly dropped her shoulders at Subaru's response, while Frederica gently patted her head as if to console her,

Frederica: "Petra, don't be sad. Can't you see how much Subaru-sama regrets admitting his own powerlessness?"

Petra: "...Uunn, Frederica-oneesama."

Frederica: "Everyone has misgivings about their own inadequacies. Subaru-sama is the same, and you as well. By admitting it, Subaru-sama is nevertheless searching for ways to overcome it. So what about Petra?"

Petra: "Uuu"

Sniffing back her tears once again, Petra looked up at Subaru,

Petra: "Is, is there really... nothing I can do at the mansion?"

Subaru: "...Hm, sorry. There's nothing Petra can help with this time. And I'm not strong enough to look after you. Sorry about that."

Seeing Subaru lower his head, Petra squeezed shut her eyes and wiped them clean with her sleeves.

When she looked up again, there was no longer any trace of her tears. With only a faint, lingering redness in the corners of her eyes, she picked up the hems of her dress in a curtsy,

Petra: “I understand, Subaru-sama. From tonight onwards, Petra will take her leave. Once everything has settled down, please be sure to call for me.”

Subaru: “Yeah, for sure. When everything’s settled...”

When everyone in the mansion and everyone in the Sanctuary are safe, and their faces are adorned with smiles.

Petra accepted Subaru’s proposal, and thus marked the end of the first phase of their talks.

—Picking up the emptied cups and briefly cleaning herself up, Petra took her leave from the lounge, and only Subaru and Frederica were left in the room.

With the sound of the door closing, and sensing Petra’s footsteps growing further and further down the hallway, Subaru reached for a piece of sweet pastry and took a bite,

Subaru: “Mind if I ask you some questions, Frederica?”

Frederica: “Depends on the questions, Subaru-sama.”

Hearing her give this answer as if it were a matter of course, Subaru wryly smiled. Nevertheless, Frederica retained her calm composure, awaiting Subaru’s first question.

Drawing in a deep breath, Subaru taxed his mind trying to decide what to say first. But there was really only one question he wanted her to answer.

Subaru: “What exactly does Garfiel want to accomplish in the Sanctuary?”

Frederica: “—Did something happen between you and that no-good little brother of mine?”

Subaru: “All sorts of things, actually. As for whether our disagreements are completely irreconcilable, or if they could be resolved through words... that’s what I’m trying to find out.”

Depending on the answer, Subaru will have to adjust his plans accordingly.

Whether to treat Garfiel as an enemy to be destroyed, or an ally worth bringing to his side.

Frederica: “Since you don’t sound surprised, my little brother must have told you about his relationship with me?”

Subaru: “Ryuzu-san didn’t deny it either. You know Ryuzu-san, don’t you?”

Frederica: “Of course. When I still lived inside the Sanctuary, she was the one who raised us like we were her own family... Considering the time we lived together, she is like a mother, or a grandmother to us.”

Subaru: “That explains why Garfiel keeps calling her granny.”

Subaru could still hear his heart-wrenching scream of “Nanna” as he left him.

Perhaps that was what Garfiel used to call her, before he took up using the ruder address of “Granny”. If that was what he really felt,

Subaru: “Was Garfiel a total grandma’s boy when he was little?”

Frederica: “If you mean his relationship with grandmother... Then yes. Despite appearances, my little brother is awfully sentimental, and I do believe he is very fond of our grandmother... as much as he tries to hide it.”

In his sister’s eyes, Garfiel’s deep attachment to Ryuzu was clear.

But Subaru still couldn’t understand what went wrong to make the self-proclaimed Guardian of the Sanctuary resort to such brutality as he did.

Subaru: “His behavioral tendencies are one thing, whether or not I can forgive him is another...”

Frederica: “Subaru-sama?”

Subaru: “Nothing. I just remembered something that made a bit of hostility surge up. Though I try not to let prejudice cloud my judgement if I can help it...”

What was Garfiel thinking that could have driven him to massacre the villagers? Even now, Subaru couldn’t begin to surmise what was going on deep inside.

But, as a byproduct of the Sanctuary's immortality experiments, the command right to control Ryuzu Meyers and the resp maintenance of the facility were certainly in Garfiel's hands.

Then why would he destroy the facility? And before that, how did he receive the command right in the first place? There was still too much Subaru didn't understand—

Subaru: "Frederica. I already know that you were once a resident of the Sanctuary. And, being a quarter-blood, you can move through the barrier unhindered."

Frederica: "How did you..."

Subaru: "And Garfiel is the same. But even though he can leave, he chose to stay behind. Say, Frederica. Do you... know why the Sanctuary was first created?"

It had only been the fourth day since Subaru left for the Sanctuary. The ungodly amount of information he had gathered in so short a time was shocking, but Frederica's eyes widened even further when she heard Subaru's question.

Frederica: "No, I don't know the details. I understand that the Sanctuary was created by the late Witch of Greed in order to conduct some sort of experiment, but..."

Subaru: "You don't? Really? You sure you don't want to change your answer?"

Frederica: "I wouldn't know what you are suspecting of me, but my answer will not change. The Sanctuary had been the Witch's Experimental Grounds and the barrier drawn by the Witch still stands, not to be dispelled until the Trials are completed. That is as much as I know."

In closing, Frederica slowly shook her head. Subaru had no way to verify whether she was telling the truth, but she didn't appear to be lying.

In other words, Frederica didn't seem to know the truth about the immortality experiments. That would also mean that she had no idea about the byproduct of those experiments,

Subaru: "Wait. Then, Frederica... you don't know anything about the command right used to control the replicants?"

Frederica: "Repli... cants? No, I've never heard of such a thing."

Her denial was in the same vein as before.

Hearing her answer, Subaru fell speechless as he relinquished his weight onto the sofa.

Frederica: “My apologies. It seems my answers did not meet your expectations.”

Subaru: “No, no it’s fine. It’s not your fault... Frederica, how many years ago was it when you left the Sanctuary? If you don’t mind me asking?”

Frederica: “It was about seven years ago when I left the Sanctuary to serve in the mansion. Ram arrived a little later than I did, so you could say I am the oldest servant here.”

Rem’s name was not among Frederica’s reminiscences, nor did the extent of her knowledge of the Sanctuary change from the previous loops.

Letting out a sigh, Subaru decided that the likelihood that Frederica was withholding information from him was nearly zero. Despite changing his approach, her answers remained the same, which could only mean that they were probably true.

Frederica had no knowledge of the immortality experiments and was probably unaware of the Ryuzu replicants as well. Either the Ryuzu clones were able to seamlessly hide their daily rotations, or the meticulous Frederica today used to be more of a klutz when she was younger.

Subaru: “But then, what about Garfiel? When did that guy find out the truth about the Sanctuary...?”

If Garfiel held the command right over the replicants, he must have known about the facility. Even if not for that, he was most likely the one who destroyed it afterwards.

There was no doubt that Garfiel knew about the experiments conducted on Ryuzu Meyer. If he knew this while his older sister didn’t, then he must have found out after his sister had left the Sanctuary. Or, perhaps, it was because he knew that he chose to stay behind?

Subaru: “—Ah.”

Coming to that thought, Subaru suddenly noticed the crucial piece he had overlooked. The moment he realized this, he simply couldn’t believe his own stupidity.

Subaru: “If that guy holds command right over the replicants, then doesn’t that mean he’s met the same conditions I did? That means, that guy’s also considered an Apostle of Greed, doesn’t it...?”

That is to say, there needed to be no better proof that Garfiel had met the Witch of Greed, Echidna.

Subaru hugged his head, resenting the fact that he didn’t realize this earlier. If Garfiel had met with Echidna, that would explain why he was the one holding the command right. Whether it was his prejudice against the Trials or his empathy towards Emilia’s failures, that would explain all of it.

Subaru: “Frederica— Garfiel challenged the Trials before, didn’t he?”

Frederica: “—! How did you...”

Subaru: “It’s only because all sorts of clues were pointing to it that I managed to get there. Though of course, I’m guessing he failed... But what exactly happened?”

An affirmation from Frederica was as good as Subaru wrapping his fist around the central piece of the puzzle.

Letting out a sigh in front of Subaru’s excited pursuit, Frederica closed her eyes as if to draw from the depths of her memories.

Frederica: “...I am not the only one who wished for the Sanctuary to be liberated. There was a time when my little brother also strived so that grandmother and the others could one day see the outside world. My brother was very young then, when he sneaked into the Tomb to challenge the Trials. And I remember how jealous I was of his recklessness.”

Subaru: “Frederica... have you ever gone in there?”

Frederica: “I myself never had the courage to do so. Even though I knew that passing the Trials would mean the liberation of the Sanctuary, I was always told that I cannot go in there. That was why I was so envious of my little brother when he ran straight inside.”

He could almost see it.

Even more reckless than he is now, the young Garfiel must have gone into the Tomb full of confidence for only the simple desire to let those he cared for catch a glimpse of the outside world.

But,

Frederica: “When my little brother didn’t come out, I was so regretful that I didn’t stop him that I went to find grandmother... And though grandmother also hesitated for a moment, she decided to go in after him. I sat there praying, and, after a short while, she brought my little brother back to me. But...”

—Do not go into the Tomb again. Forget everything you saw today and never speak of it to anyone.

That must have been what Ryuzu asked of her.

Listening to this story, Subaru recalled the contradictions in Ryuzu’s words from before. There was the Ryuzu who claimed to have entered the Tomb, and the Ryuzu who claimed she never did.

It was only when he learned of the existence of multiple Ryuzu, coupled with the constraint that they cannot lie, that this contradiction was resolved. And, it was only after the present conversation that he realized,

Subaru: “Garfiel had challenged the Trials. And there, he must have met the Witch of Greed. All sorts of things are finally starting to make sense...”

Why Garfiel felt the way he did towards the Trials, and why the command right was in his hands.

The question now was what he saw in his past, why he wanted to stop Subaru from liberating the Sanctuary, and why Echidna never told Subaru about Garfiel. The answers to all of them lay inside the Tomb.

Subaru: “I’ll definitely need to see Echidna at least one more time...”

And expose every secret that all-knowing Witch tried to hide from him.

Subaru quietly made up his mind as Frederica watched him in silence.

Sensing her gaze, Subaru scratched his cheek and muttered “Sorry”,

Subaru: “For all sorts of things. And for asking you questions you didn’t want to be asked.”

Frederica: “It’s fine. I know it is necessary. I’ve received such orders from the Master as well. If telling you this... could help Emilia-sama liberate the Sanctuary, then I don’t mind at all.”

Subaru: “The Sanctuary will definitely be liberated. There’s a reason I must make sure that it comes to pass, and I’ll use any means necessary to do it. But as for how much of that matches Garfiel’s plans for it, I’ll have to put that lower down the list.”

Frederica: “...”

Subaru: “I have no idea what Garfiel’s thinking. In the worst case, he’ll be against me at every turn, but I won’t make any compromises. As much as I should apologize, it will be for the greater good.”

In order to forestall the disasters approaching the mansion and the Sanctuary, Subaru must sweep aside everything that stood in his way.

Listening to Subaru’s answer, Frederica firmly closed her eyes once more,

Frederica: “Please take care of my no-good little brother.”

—She lowered her head and replied.

Arc 4 Chapter 60 - A Tale of the End of the End

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 12, Chapter 3 “A Four-Hundred-Year-Old Cry”, Part 3-4
(halfway)

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken – [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#)

After his conversation with Frederica came to an end, Subaru went up to the third floor of the mansion and was now standing in the hallway outside of Roswaal’s study.

The heaviness in his head was perhaps due to the accumulated fatigue, or the weight of the troubles ahead, waiting to be solved.

Subaru: “Once again, I’ll have to wing it...”

Scratching his neck, Subaru scowled at the pitiful hand he had been dealt. Even though he had far more information than in the previous loops, it wasn’t immediately obvious how any of it related to the problems at hand.

With so many missing pieces, all he could do was fumble around without seeing any semblance of a picture, leaving only the unease of the uncertain future looming inside his chest.

Frederica: “Subaru-sama. What are you doing?”

Seeing Subaru standing frozen in the hallway, Frederica, who was quietly waiting at his side, called out to him.

After concluding their conversation in the lounge, Frederica had opted to accompany him. Hearing her question, Subaru mumbled “Aah, yeah”, vaguely nodding in return,

Subaru: “Frederica, after you came back to the mansion, you haven’t seen Beatrice around... have you?”

Frederica: “No, I haven’t. She very rarely makes appearances in the first place, but I haven’t seen her even once since my return, I’m ashamed to say.”

Subaru: “I guess she’s really doubling down on staying hidden this time. It’s understandable that Frederica couldn’t find her.”

In fact, if she was really serious about finding Beatrice, she would have had to open every door that could be connected to the Forbidden Library. It would be one thing if this was only limited to the doors in the mansion, but there were doors in Arlam Village and the Sanctuary to consider as well,

Subaru: “The range is way too wide, and there’s no way to narrow it down. If I were more pessimistic, I’d say it’s impossible to solve.”

Frederica: “Then, what do you plan to do? You have something to say to Beatrice-sama, don’t you, Subaru-sama?”

Subaru: “If she really wants to stay hidden, there’s no way anyone can find her. That’s just a fact.”

Hearing Subaru repeat what he had just said, Frederica furrowed her brows. Sensing her doubtful gaze, Subaru gave his neck a crack and held up a single finger,

Subaru: “But here’s the thing... No one can find her if she’s serious about trying to stay hidden, but if she’s not serious about trying to stay hidden, that’s a different story.”

Frederica: “If she’s not serious?”

Subaru: “She’s not the kind of girl who hides so that no one will ever find her. Everyone who’s played hide-and-seek secretly hopes that they’ll be found in the end. So, deep down, there’s always going to be a little demon inside saying «I hope they find me».”

Saying this, Subaru took a few steps to the left and did a quick turn. Standing ninety-degrees to the hallway, Subaru stopped right in front of the room next to Roswaal’s study— The archives room. A narrow storage space where all the paper documents have been neatly stockpiled, the result of Otto’s frenzied organization-efforts.

Reaching out his hand to the door, Subaru felt the distinct sensation of a correct answer through the doorknob.

Subaru: “Incredibly though, every time I open a door... Rather, I mean every time I think about opening a door, I’d just suddenly get the feeling that it’s the one. I still don’t really know how it works.”

Frederica: “Subaru-sama...”

Subaru: “Aaaand, we’re open!”

Frederica stuttered as Subaru flung the door open with a sound effect. Behind it, there was something off about space that should have been the archive room— It was the unmistakable scent of books stowed away for ages that poured out of the room.

Unlike the scent of documents meant to be processed at the earliest convenience, it was closer to the fragrance of ink buried deep within tightly bound pages.

Subaru: “I don’t think I’ll be late, but, if it gets too dark, don’t forget to bring Petra back to the village.”

Keeping his hand on the doorknob, Subaru reminded Frederica, who was still in a state of shock.

Frederica blinked several times, before she bowed holding the hems of her dress,

Frederica: “Then I will await your return. Please take care.”

Subaru: “Ooooh. I almost feel like an important person after hearing that.”

With the maid’s auspicious send-off, Subaru stepped through the door and into the room. As soon as he was inside, the door clamped shut behind him, and, with the sound of a non-existent breeze, the space bent and twisted. The link had been severed, and the Forbidden Library once again stood alone from the world. Then,

Beatrice: “You finally came, I suppose.”

Subaru was met with a paltry, unwelcoming voice. Holding back the wry smile that was encroaching onto his face, Subaru waved hello,

Subaru: “Yo, Beako! Long time no see, you’re still as little as ever.”

Beatrice: “Your antics are annoying enough for an entire lifetime, you know. Seriously... I should give up already.”

Beatrice was seated halfway up a wooden step ladder, holding a book with black binding against her chest.

Seeing her there, Subaru imagined that perhaps she only ever sat there. The Forbidden Library had plenty of proper desks and chairs as well. But she always seemed to greet him from that very same spot. For some reason, the thought of it just gnawed at his heart.

Beatrice: “You’re making that spineless face again. It’s unsightly, I suppose. You’re free to feel as hurt and confused as you want, but it’s unpleasant when you do it in front of Betty, so please stop immediately.”

Subaru: “Haughty as ever. Sorry, but I have no reason to follow your request. I still have to confirm whether we have that kind of relationship or not.”

Subaru was almost trying to hint about what he had learned about her in the previous loops. Beatrice’s face darkened at his words, and muttered “Is that how it is, I suppose...” under her breath,

Beatrice: “Fine. It seems we both have cards in our hands now, I suppose.”

Subaru: “It’s still pretty questionable whether my cards are gonna have any effect. But let’s have imagination make up for the rest.”

Beatrice: “Do as you like... since either way...”

Suddenly, Beatrice’s rigid expression unraveled.

The stubborn, mask-like facade fell away, revealing a glimpse of her calm, gentle smile and the dream-like gleam in her eyes— Inadvertently, Subaru fell silent as his throat froze. Then,

Beatrice: “The term of this long, long, long Contract is coming to an end— At the end of the end of the end, this time, Betty will be released from this stagnation, I suppose.”

Her voice was almost lonely as she spoke.

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Subaru: “At the end of the end of the end... huh. That’s quite a poetic expression.”

Seeing how Beatrice seemed to be ready for what was to come, Subaru shrugged and tossed in that feint. Briefly looking her over, his gaze landed on the black-bound book in her arms— If what Roswaal said was true, this would be one of the two perfect Gospels in existence.

A book which foretells the future. While there is a prophetic aspect to it, Subaru felt that it was closer to a book which instructs on the future.

Convinced of the Gospel’s significance, Petelgeuse of the Witch Cult had followed its incomplete entries to the point of fanaticism. And it was precisely because the incomplete version failed to record the outcomes that the madman was ultimately slain by Subaru.

Subaru: “That know-it-all expression of yours... is it also thanks to that book?”

Beatrice: “...I should be asking you. Just how much do you know about this book, I suppose.”

Subaru: “Roswaal ran his mouth over all sorts of things, you know. I think I got the basics, more or less... It’s similar to the ones the Witch Cultists have, but better. The only two left in the world are split between you and Roswaal.”

Beatrice: “That blabbermouth Roswaal. I can just imagine him happily yammering away the moment you gave him an excuse, I suppose.”

Sensing Beatrice’s scorn in those words, Subaru’s brows furrowed.

Even though Beatrice was often critical of Roswaal in their day to day life, Subaru had always put it off as a sign of their amicable relationship. But her words just now did not carry even a hint of that affection.

Instead, it was a statement of Beatrice’s sincere and genuine disgust towards Roswaal.

Subaru: "I still don't know what kind of relationship you have with Roswaal. But you two share the only two copies of the Gospel between you, and you've sealed a Contract with his bloodline forcing you to live inside his mansion."

Beatrice: "Whatever are you trying to say, just say it."

Subaru: "Then I'll cut right to the chase. The position you're in is way too murky."

Beatrice narrowed her eyes. An intimidating presence quite unbecoming of her adorable appearance emanated from her body, giving Subaru the illusion that he was being swept by a violent wind.

The moment they cut into the main topic, the atmosphere surrounding Beatrice rapidly changed.

Subaru: "I mean, I can kind of see where Roswaal is at. Being the descendant of a family contracted with the Witch of Greed, he's inherited its obligations along with it. Managing the Sanctuary is just a natural part of that, though I guess his reason for supporting Emilia in the Royal Selection is a bit less clear."

Beatrice: "..."

Subaru: "On the other hand, I don't see where you'd fit in all this. Roswaal is contracted with the Witch of Greed. In other words, he's an Apostle of Greed."

The fact that Roswaal refused to call her Witch of Greed and stubbornly insisted on calling her Echidna was just a testament to his extraordinary devotion to the Witch.

His position was clear, and there was no doubt that he was an Apostle of Greed, just like Subaru. Although, whereas Echidna made Subaru an Apostle without asking his permission, Roswaal inherited it along with his position as the head of his family.

Subaru: "I'm not sure if the Gospels... used by the Witch Cultists have the same origins as yours. But I imagine they were made by different creators. And while I have no idea who created the Witch Cultists' Gospels, I think I have an idea who the creator of the two complete Gospels might be."

Beatrice: "...And who is that, I suppose."

Subaru: "—It's Echidna, right?"

The moment the name escaped his lips, Subaru could sense Beatrice's breath halting.

To her, the name he had just uttered clearly held no small significance.

Inside Echidna's dream Citadel, Subaru had seen her nigh-omniscient artifact, the so-called Book of Wisdom.

Though the nature of the Book of Wisdom was different from that of the Gospels, they were alike in that they were both magical guidebooks that contained information beyond the reach of human knowledge. And when all the individuals involved were connected to the Sanctuary, it was as if everything was pointing to the answer.

Subaru: "Yours and Roswaal's Gospels were made by Echidna, weren't they? Roswaal's must have been passed down through the generations. But, how did you get your hands on yours?"

Beatrice: "..."

Subaru: "So now I have a question for you... about your Door Crossing."

Raising a single finger, Subaru changed directions and threw out an entirely different topic.

Beatrice blinked at Subaru's rhetorical shift, before righting herself again in preparation for his next words. Seeing this, Subaru pronounced his question.

Subaru: "—What is the effective range of your Door Crossing? Or in this case, the range in which you can select destinations?"

Beatrice: "...I don't see what you could possibly do with this information."

Subaru: "If the answer is what I think it is, then that'll confirm a few of my theories."

Crossing his arms, Subaru puffed up his chest in front of the silent Beatrice.

For a moment, Beatrice hesitated as her lips trembled. Then, as if in resignation, she closed her eyes,

Beatrice: "Betty's Door Crossing can link spaces within the same building. Or nearby places, or places I know. As for distance... it cannot link to places that are too far away."

Subaru: “There’s still another condition, isn’t there?”

Beatrice: “You think Betty has any reason to tell you?”

Subaru: “Then, how about I guess? —Even if a place is far away, you can still link to it if it has some deep connection to your existence. Isn’t that right?”

Beatrice: “———”

Breathless, Beatrice’s eyes widened.

Watching her reaction, Subaru was convinced of his assumption.

Subaru: “Say if you need to activate Door Crossing when your concentration is thrown off, what’ll decide which door you link to?”

Beatrice: “...Stop.”

Subaru: “Under pressure, anyone would resort to the most familiar words and actions. When applied to something like Door Crossing, I wouldn’t be surprised if the first place that comes to mind is the one that holds the strongest bonds of memories.”

Beatrice: “...Stop it, I suppose.”

Subaru: “Putting together the fact that you’ve received Echidna’s Gospel, and that you can link the Library to the Sanctuary with Door Crossing— That could only mean...”

Beatrice: “—I told you to stop!”

The girl stood up from the wobbling step ladder, and looked to Subaru almost as if she was pleading. Beatrice bit into her lips, and her eyes began to tear.

There was no doubt that Subaru had trespassed into a realm she did not wish to be stained.

Gripped by that wretched sensation in his chest, Subaru shook his head,

Subaru: “No, I won’t stop. I know that Door Crossing connects this place to somewhere in the Sanctuary. As for why that is, your desperate denials just now had already given me the answer.”

Beatrice: "..."

Subaru: "Beatrice. You have something to do with the Sanctuary, don't you? What's your relationship to Echidna?"

Despite knowing that he was trampling on a girl's heart, Subaru nonetheless stifled his hesitation and crushed Beatrice with his question.

Through Door Crossing, she had sent him to the site of the immortality-experiment in the Sanctuary. In her state of distress, that was the place she chose to send him, which could only mean that that place held the strongest memories in her mind.

How was it, that as a Spirit, her deepest memories were linked to a facility which produces replicas of Ryuzu Meyer? And considering that Echidna had given her a Gospel—

Subaru: "Beatrice... Who's the person that you're contracted with?"

Beatrice: "———!"

Subaru: "I once asked Puck about it. How Spirit Contracts work. I won't go into details here, but apparently the terms of the Contract must be equal between the Contractor and the Spirit. You said you were bound by the Contract to be the Keeper of the Forbidden Library. So, who're you contracted with?"

Beatrice: "...Ah."

Subaru: "All this time, I just assumed that your Contract was with Roswaal. Seeing how you're living in his house, managing his library, it was only natural to think that... But now, I'm not so sure."

Faced with Subaru's relentless questioning, Beatrice couldn't utter a sound in defense, but merely spilled a feeble sigh from her quivering lips.

Her tiny body seemed to be even tinier, and, as if seeking a harbor, she tightened her arms around the Gospel against her chest. As if she was enduring something unbearable, her figure seemed ephemeral and fragile.

He could see it. But even though he could see, he chose to say it.

Subaru: “—You are a Spirit contracted with Echidna, aren’t you?”

—And so began the end of the end.

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—The instant he asked that question, Beatrice collapsed like a puppet that had lost its strings.

Subaru: “Bea—!?”

The girl’s knees fell to the floor, and with the sound of scattering paper, the pages of the Gospel in Beatrice’s arms scattered across the tiles.

The book she had so often carried with her, opened who knows how many times to run her fingers through it, now exploded from its binding at the impact of the drop as if the repetitive routine had worn away its integrity, spreading out like a white carpet over the surface of the floor.

Subaru: “The Gospel... Wh—?”

Watching several pages land at his feet, Subaru bent down and picked them up without thinking. Petelgeuse’s Gospel flashed across his mind with the image of its pages buried under small, dense scrawlings as if infected by the madness of its owner.

That was his impression before he picked up these pages— but the moment he examined them before his eyes, that impression evaporated like a mist. Because,

Subaru: “What... th—? They’re blank...?”

Turning them front and back, there was nothing recorded on the pages in his hands.

Frantically, he picked up the other pages at his feet, but there was nothing written on them either. He began to wonder whether the pages of the empty latter half had just happened to land near him, but,

Subaru: “No, how’s that possible...”

Crouching down, Subaru looked over each of the pages scattered around Beatrice, and realized it.

Of all the pages covering the floor around her, not a single one of them had a word recorded on it.

Of the hundreds upon hundreds of fallen pages, what were the chances of them all landing on their blank side?

Subaru: "It's supposed to be a Gospel... Why's there nothing on it?"

Rather than believe in a miracle where only the blank sides landed facing up, it would be far more reasonable to conclude that the pages were simply blank to begin with. Yet, following from that reasonable conclusion, Subaru was struck by another, all too unreasonable fact.

Subaru: "This is supposed to be one of only two complete Gospels, why's there no future recorded in here? Is it because only the owner can read it? Maybe it's not like Petelgeuse's?"

Maybe it was a difference between the perfect and imperfect Gospels, but Subaru had only ever had an imperfect version for reference. The texts on that book were visible even to someone who wasn't its owner. It had been in Subaru's keeping ever since it lost its owner, and fortunately, there hadn't been any new entries appearing.

Consequently, Subaru had been under the impression that the Gospel's texts would be visible to anyone, regardless of who the owner was.

Beatrice: "It has been so... so long."

Subaru: "—Huh?"

Beatrice: "How many years it has been... since that Gospel stopped showing Betty the future..."

Collapsed on the floor with her face downcast, Beatrice quietly whispered.

"What's that supposed to mean?", Subaru barely managed to control his urge to ask her while anxiously waiting for her next words.

Beatrice hunched forward and pressed her hands into the scattered pages and clenched them until they crumpled. Her fingers were trembling, and her voice was interspersed with sobs.

Beatrice: "The role given to Betty is to watch over the Library of Knowledge. Until the day comes when we meet again, I will guard this place... I suppose."

Subaru: "Library of Knowledge... is that, here?"

Subaru stood up and looked over the countless bookshelves that filled the room. All the books stored here, a few of which he himself had flipped through, Subaru had always assumed to have belonged to the House of Mathers, but,

Subaru: "All the books here... are Echidna's?"

Beatrice: "She was fond of... gathering knowledge."

Subaru: "To the point where she's calling herself a Witch, I guess."

She went so far as to call herself the Incarnation of the Thirst for Knowledge. Boasting of her desire for all the knowledge in the world, it was just what one would expect from someone bearing the name of Greed. The countless volumes collected on these shelves must just have been the result of her efforts.

And Beatrice would be the librarian of Echidna's shelter of knowledge.

Beatrice: "From the sound of it... you've been in the Tomb, I suppose."

Subaru: "Yeah, I have. I got treated badly and had a pretty painful experience... But now I'm glad I went. Having Echidna as a confidant is kind of a double-edged sword, you know."

Even though she was the only person he could mention his Return by Deaths to, when he did, he had invited the wrath of the Witch of Envy. Since doing so again would mean another certain death, he intended to avoid it if he could. Though he would repeat it if he must.

Subaru: "...Just now, you said the Gospel hasn't shown you the future in years?"

Beatrice: "That is, the truth."

Subaru: "I'm not doubting you. No, I mean, I still am, but. Because, right? Otherwise, when you... If there's nothing written on the Gospel..."

—Then all those times she saved him, she had chosen to help Subaru.

In the loop before last, in the moments before their parting, Subaru had first learned of her Gospel's existence, and it shocked him to no small degree.

He had been made to believe that Beatrice's every action and every thought had been because it was recorded in the Gospel and her own feelings had no say in the matter.

And so, in spite of the distress of the girl before his eyes, somehow, he was more relieved to know that there was something real inside her. To know that Beatrice's actions were reflections of her own heart—though he couldn't understand why, he felt relieved nonetheless.

Even without knowing the reason, all along, Subaru had felt it.

Beatrice had been kind to him for no discernable reason at all, and he didn't know what he could have done to make her feel this way.

Subaru: "Why... did you help me? It wasn't written in the Gospel, right? You could have just left me there."

He knew that it was an unfair and roundabout question.

Placing all the burden of answering on Beatrice, Subaru knew that he was only caring about what he wanted. He knew, and he chose this cowardly approach anyway.

Subaru just wanted to ask Beatrice, plain and simple.

—Do you think of me as your friend?

Beatrice: "Betty... helped... you, because..."

Subaru: "Yes. You've helped me so many times. You healed me when I was on the brink of death, you cured me from the Wolgarm's curse, and when I was so ridden with curses that there was no doubt that I was going to die, you told me the truth."

And there were so many, many more occasions beyond that.

In the loops beginning in the mansion, when Rem was murdered and no one in the mansion trusted Subaru, only Beatrice and Emilia chose to save him.

In the time he spent being tormented by loneliness and fear, Beatrice alone kept her promise to him. It was a kindness from a lost world that remained only inside Subaru's heart, one he could not allow himself to forget. And so,

Subaru: "If you didn't do it for your Gospel, then..."

Beatrice: "—In the end, I was told..."

Tossing all the other questions aside, the only thing Subaru wanted to know was whether Beatrice considered him a friend. Was she someone he could trust with all that he was— now that Rem was gone, and Emilia's weaknesses were laid bare before him, could Beatrice take their place?

In a sense, it was an all too selfish request. And,

Beatrice: "...That one day, That Person will visit Betty's library. And I must protect the library until then."

Subaru: "...That Person?"

Beatrice: "So I was told, I suppose. Until That Person comes, Betty must keep watch over the library. Whether you are That Person or not, Betty isn't sure."

Subaru's eyes flared with passion as he looked to Beatrice, but her melancholy words soon made them lose their luster as his brows furrowed with uncertainty.

He couldn't understand what Beatrice was saying. Impossible to understand. It was impossible, and yet— He had a feeling that he must stop her from saying what she was about to say next.

Beatrice: "Betty doesn't know... whether you're That Person or not... but."

Subaru: "Wait, Beatrice. We're both getting a bit ahead of ourselves. Let's just calm down and..."

Beatrice: "Whether you're That Person, or not... It doesn't matter, I suppose."

Beatrice lifted her downcast face. Her two drill curls swayed with her movements. As if at a loss, as if hesitating, it was as if her heart was reflected within Subaru's.

An ominous premonition tightened in Subaru's chest, impossible to wipe away,

Beatrice: "Even if you're not That Person, I don't care anymore. So..."

Subaru: "Bea—"

Beatrice: "Please kill Betty, and end this Contract once and for all, I suppose. Bring an end to the end of the end. Betty wants to be released."

Tears welled up in Beatrice's eyes, and a feeble smile appeared on her lips,

Beatrice: "You, will become That Person—"

Arc 4 Chapter 61 - A Scream from Four-Hundred Years Ago

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 12, Chapter 3 “A Four-Hundred-Year-Old Cry”, Part 4 (starting halfway)

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken – [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#)

Entranced by the sadness of her eyes, Subaru couldn't bear to look away.

An emotion emerged in his chest, making him want to snicker and laugh at her words,

—What did you say just now?

He should have thrown her senseless words back at her.

He should have twisted his lips into a grin and cracked a joke like they always did.

But there was— Just a hunch, telling him that it wouldn't work. Because otherwise,

Subaru: “———”

Why else wasn't he laughing off the girl's death-wish as some joke?

Subaru: “What did you... say, just now?”

After a moment of hesitation and a brief lapse of silence, Subaru stuttered out this prepared line.

It would have been perfect if his lips were still smiling and his shoulders weren't shuddering. But,

Subaru: “...Ah.”

His cheeks grew stiff, and he was trembling all the way to the tips of his fingers, let alone his shoulders.

It was as if the Natsuki Subaru reflected within Beatrice's eyes was fixed in place, trapped within the confines of that world.

Beatrice: "As you wish, I will say it again, I suppose."

Subaru: "No, wait..."

Beatrice: "—Betty wants to be ended by your hands."

Subaru: "Stop it!!"

Screaming, Subaru shouted over Beatrice's words.

It was almost comical how they've switched places from just moments before.

These were the same words Beatrice had shouted when Subaru relentlessly pushed his discoveries upon her. And so, Subaru didn't exactly have the right to complain when Beatrice did the same to him. Yet, even though he knew he had no right,

Subaru: "Do you... even realize... what you've just said...?"

Beatrice: "I should be asking you. Do you understand what I've just asked of you, I suppose?"

Subaru: "What?"

Beatrice: "I want you to be the one to bring about the end of this Spirit, Beatrice. You will be That Person who marks the end of the Contract that, for four-hundred years, has bound me."

"You should take that as a compliment", she seemed to say with her strange, ironic smile.

It was a smile that seemed to be thirsting for something— watching her, Subaru felt like twisted claws were tearing his chest from within.

Unable to bear it, he clutched his hand to his heart,

Subaru: "I don't understand... Are you telling me you want to die?"

Beatrice: “Do I want to die? Strictly speaking, no, I suppose. Betty wishes for the Contract to end. Betty wants to be released from this everlasting Covenant.”

Subaru: “If that means taking your life, how is that any different!!”

Stamping down his foot, Subaru screamed from his trembling lungs.

He was trampling on the scattered Gospel pages, but he didn’t care.

Jabbing out his finger, Subaru glared at Beatrice and barked.

Subaru: “Don’t talk about wanting to die like it’s some joke! Wanting to die or whatever... I don’t care what you say to other people... just don’t say it in front of me!”

Once you’re dead, you won’t come back to life.

Natsuki Subaru was the exception, and was even able to start over if he died. Only Subaru could throw away his life and still come out with something of value, and so only Subaru could justify suicide.

But that was not the case for Beatrice. Nor anyone else, for that matter.

Once life is lost, it can never be retrieved.

Knowing this, she still said it to Subaru’s face.

Subaru: “What do you mean you want it to end!? Do you realize how selfish that is!? Asking for an end... Trying to die, even if everyone else forgives you I won’t forgive you for it!”

Beatrice: “What an arrogant thing to say, I suppose— And just how much do you know about Betty?”

Nevertheless, Beatrice gave him this cold and unyielding reply.

She smoothed out her dress, stood up, and ran her fingers against the tips of her curls,

Beatrice: “Betty is the Guardian of Knowledge and has been watching over the Forbidden Library for four-hundred years. For four-hundred years... in accordance to the Contract, Betty has waited here.”

Subaru: “Four... hundred years...?”

That number again? Subaru wanted to click his tongue and furrow his brows.

Four-hundred years ago was an age when the Witches ran rampant, a contemptible era which seems to have at least something to do with every long-lived being he knew.

Beatrice, too, had lived through that age, and still lives on to this day.

Beatrice: "I sealed my Contract with the Witch, and came to live with the House of Mathers that had a similar Contract. From the beginning, I followed the Gospel's instruction, and simply passed the days in silence, waiting for that time to come."

Subaru: "———"

Beatrice: "But while I waited here, time in the outside world went on, I suppose. One-by-one, the heads of the House of Mathers, who shared in my obligations, died of old age, and was succeeded by the next. I witnessed their transfers of power, yet Betty's time flowed on, unchanging, I suppose."

And how painful must that time have been for Beatrice?

Her dispassionate tone only seemed to be a reflection of the abrasions left by the meaningless passage of time, driving a chill into Subaru's heart as he listened.

Beatrice: "The destined coming of the promised day— Betty didn't know when it would come, or who That Person would be, and I passed those days without knowing anything."

"But even so", Beatrice shook her head,

Beatrice: "It never worried me, I suppose. After all, the Gospel was in Betty's hands. As long as I place my faith in the Gospel that records the future, and wait for the coming day to appear on its white pages, then all will be well in the end. If I only waited, that time will surely come... I went on believing that."

Subaru: "But..."

Looking down at the pages trampled under his feet, Subaru felt the cruelty of their pristine whiteness. As if sensing the meaning of Subaru's gaze, Beatrice nodded.

In fact, before she knew it, the Gospel that was meant to be her beacon of hope, had——

Beatrice: “Every day, checking time after time, the instruction did not change... Until even the time spent checking was too painful.”

Subaru: “...”

Beatrice: “How many times I’ve dreamt of new words appearing on the page after the final entry, I suppose. Time and time again, I envisioned the day when that unknown person would come to visit Betty, when I would have finally fulfilled the role given to me.”

Subaru: “...Beatrice.”

Beatrice: “The House of Mathers is not without its visitors, I suppose. Many humans have visited Betty’s Forbidden Library, and many have touched the Forbidden Library’s door... But each time, Betty’s heart would be betrayed.”

And the one who opened the door was not that person.

So many times, she was disappointed, and so many times, her hopes were dashed. Over and over, her betrayed expectations must have worn down her heart until her eyes were buried in apathy.

Time and time again, Beatrice’s hopes came to nothing. And now, even that hope was lost. She could no longer endure the pain of being hoisted up within reach of her hopes, only to be cast to the ground once more.

It was only natural that her heart, which had endured so much, would begin to tear.

Beatrice: “It was during that time, that I realized... or maybe, I had realized it long ago, I suppose.”

Subaru: “Realized what?”

Beatrice: “The Gospel will never show Betty another instruction.”

Beatrice folded her knees, and picked up the fallen cover of the Gospel. Emptied of its pages, the binding just seemed extraordinarily lonely.

Lifting it up, she traced her fingers over the cover, and began again, “Did you know, I suppose?”,

Beatrice: “That the Gospel records its owner’s future? The less its owner deviates from the world memories, the clearer its details will be.”

Subaru: “World memories...?”

Beatrice: “The Memories of the World, I suppose— It knows not only the present and the past of the world, but also the future that is to come, in fact. The Book of Wisdom is a forbidden text which draws its needed information from there. Whereas the Gospel merely inherited a portion of its functionalities, I suppose.”

Echidna herself had coined the Book of Wisdom to be the Memories of the World.

Indeed, there was no doubt that there existed some close connection between Echidna and Beatrice. There, Beatrice held up the black binding, as if to show it to Subaru,

Beatrice: “The false Gospels in the Witch Cultists’ possession operate on the same principle, I suppose. While their accuracy marks their only difference, their algorithms are based on this one’s, in fact.”

Subaru: “...How did this technology leak after Echidna’s death? Shouldn’t you and Roswaal have the only two existing Gospels?”

Beatrice: “Who knows. I don’t really care, I suppose. Whoever created these false copies, and whoever they are giving it to, it has nothing to do with Betty.”

Subaru: “Then why did you bring up the Witch Cult?”

Beatrice: “Because there’s something I need to do with a Witch Cult Gospel, I suppose. Don’t go jumping to conclusions.”

Unfazed by Subaru’s challenge, Beatrice replied calmly.

Beatrice: “You have a Witch Cult Gospel yourself, I suppose?”

Subaru nodded in reply.

Subaru: “I don’t have it here. I took it with me into the Sanctuary, and it’s safe there for now. As for the ones we picked up from the other Witch Cultists, we left them in more capable hands.”

The only Gospel in Subaru's possession was the one that belonged to Petelgeuse.

Most of the other Gospels, owned by Petelgeuse's fingers, were destroyed by the Cultists in their final moments, while the few that they managed to salvage were handed over to Crusch's camp to be dealt with accordingly.

In fact, if everything had gone according to plan, they were supposed to have fetched Roswaal from the Sanctuary and met up with Crusch and Anastasia's camps to divide the spoils of their victory over Petelgeuse and the White Whale.

Beatrice: "Have you looked over its contents, I suppose?"

Subaru: "Kind of... I don't know how, but I was just able to read it all of a sudden. I could barely make out that chicken scratch handwriting, but it's basically itemized information. Only... to me it looks more like a book of orders than a book of prophecies."

Subaru recalled the contents of the Gospel which Echidna's influence had most likely rendered legible.

The majority of the text in Petelgeuse's Gospel simply listed where Petelgeuse must go and what Petelgeuse must do. What would happen afterward was usually omitted entirely, and how the orders were to be carried out was left to its owner's discretion.

And so, rather than an all-powerful book of prophecies, the Witch Cultist Gospels were closer to a guidebook to the future—and no more than that.

Subaru: "If they could perfectly predict the future, there would've been nothing we could do to stop them. So I guess I can see why they're considered incomplete."

Beatrice: "Betty has no interest in its contents. What I need to know is whether it recorded its owner's passing, I suppose."

Subaru: "—Passing... is not exactly what I'd call it."

As far as Subaru knew, on the final page of Petelgeuse's Gospel,

—Aside from the words that Subaru had written in his own blood, "THE END", the Gospel's final entry was the brief passage, "In the Mathers' domain, Trial on silver-haired half-devil".

That hastily constructed sentence didn't give Petelgeuse any indication of what would happen before or after.

Indeed, if that was as much of the future as the Gospel could reveal, it was simply no match for the precision of Subaru's Return by Death.

Beatrice: "—That's what I thought."

Listening to Subaru's account of what he knew, Beatrice only nodded as if in agreement. Then, she twisted the empty cover in her hands,

Beatrice: "Did anything appear in the Gospel after that, I suppose?"

Subaru: "...No, I don't think so. At least, the last time I checked, the final entry is still the owner's final assignment. Besides, there's no way anything could show up afterwards, because..."

Just as he was about to say it, Subaru suddenly felt the words freeze in his throat. And only then, did it dawn on him why Beatrice had asked that question.

He lifted his face, and saw that Beatrice was faintly smiling. Just how many times over the course of this brief encounter had he seen her with that hollow, desolate smile?

Beatrice: "—The Gospel stopped writing, because that's where its owner's future ends."

Subaru: "N—no, you're not like him at all..."

Beatrice: "It's the same, I suppose. The fact that the Gospel stopped recording the future means that even if I exist for now, I might as well not— Can you deny that, I suppose?"

Subaru: "No! You're wro—!"

His impulsive rejection abruptly froze in front of Beatrice's unmoving pupils. She had no need for this superficial consolation. Because, in her heart, she already knew the answer to her question.

Clenching his teeth so hard that they could crack, blood seeped from the corner of Subaru's lips,

Subaru: "Why... are you... doing this!"

Beatrice: "..."

Subaru: "Don't just make up your mind all by yourself! Anyone will go down that road when left to worry all alone! When you get stuck feeling like there's no other way... you'll just wind up thinking that the most awful thing you see is the reality!"

After countless hardships and countless sighs spilled for his own powerlessness, that was what Subaru had learned.

When assailed by mounting adversities and insurmountable obstacles, the world can seem like a wall.

Even as it forces you to power through it alone, you have its black, tangling fingers holding back your solitary heart. That's why,

Subaru: "If it hurts, and you feel like you want it to change... Then just say it. Just say it to someone who'll listen. Just say you want help and that you're feeling sad... Even if it's me!"

Helpless and trapped in fate's dead-end, wallowing in a despair you could not climb out of with your own strength, when it feels like you're all alone, you need only to look around.

Then, for the first time, you'll notice the extended hand.

When you take that hand, and feel its force pulling you up, only then, will you realize,

—There is no need to give up yet.

Subaru: "How many times, you've done it for me... So this time let me do it for you...!"

Beatrice: "...I want y... to do it."

Subaru: "Yes... That's right, just say the words."

Beatrice: "I want you to help me..."

Subaru: "Yes! That's it, that's it that's it that's it! If you just ask, I'll..."

Beatrice: "I'm sad, and it hurts... Betty, wants to be saved from this darkness..."

Subaru: “Yeah, just leave it to me—”

A small, trembling finger reached out to Subaru.

Spurred on by the overflowing emotions in his chest, Subaru jumped up and extended out his hand.

He had already completely forgotten the reason he came here.

He was supposed to find a way out of the impasse and ask for Beatrice’s help. If anyone was to help him, he had hoped that it’d be her.

But it all vanished when he saw her sorrow and the darkness within her heart. Only the impulse to save a girl from her loneliness continued to push him forward.

Taking her outstretched hand would mean taking on a burden that he could never relinquish. Ignoring the crushing weight already bearing upon his shoulders, Natsuki Subaru chose to embrace yet another impossible burden.

But he didn’t mind. Because,

Beatrice: “———”

—How could he abandon a girl looking at him with those wavering eyes?

Beatrice had asked for his help.

Her request called forth an unbearable, irresistible emotion. He didn’t know why. Nor did it matter. For there was only the screaming of his soul.

Help her. Save her. Because to you, she is—

Subaru: “I will, definitely—”

Beatrice: “In that case...”

Extending a single finger, its tip touched Subaru’s.

He grasped her faltering fingers in his hand and wrapped his fingers around her palm.

Gazing into Beatrice's eyes, he saw his reflection in their watery contours. And there, as he watched a large teardrop fall,

Beatrice: "—I want you to please kill Betty."

—As if to say, "I did not ask for such convenient salvation", she let go of Subaru's hand.

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Why. The question groaned in Subaru's throat as he sucked in a breath.

Looking at the hand that was shaken away, and at his own fingers, grasping at nothing, Subaru turned to Beatrice, and wanted to ask her why.

Subaru: "——"

But no words came, because he could see in Beatrice's eyes that it was far, far, far— too late to come back from that.

Beatrice: "Four-hundred years... I've been alone, I suppose."

Subaru: "B-Beatri..."

Beatrice: "That Person who should have come, never came, and I've already spent four-hundred years alone here."

He couldn't pull his gaze away from Beatrice's eyes.

And even calling her name made him hesitate.

Beatrice: "I don't know how many times I've thought about leaving it behind me. Or how many times I prayed I could forget everything. It may have been hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of millions or more, but it's still not enough..."

In this dim and narrow room, how long had Beatrice spent in this solitude?

Hugging her knees, seated on her step ladder, she went on waiting for someone whose face and name she did not know.

An ocean of books spanning as far as the eyes can see—— even if she read every book in that ocean, she still wouldn't see her awaited person's arrival, while the book that should reveal her future had nothing to show her.

How many times had that loneliness murdered this girl's heart?

Beatrice: "I want to be saved...? I want a way out...?"

Subaru: "—Ah."

Beatrice: "Do you know how many hundreds of times... those thoughts crossed Betty's mind? Did you think Betty just gave up without ever considering such things, I suppose?"

Her broken words slowly grew in intensity.

A pressure pushed back on Subaru. His throat was muted, the burning passion of his soul was extinguished in an instant, and his limbs felt as heavy as lead. Whether it was to approach the girl before him, or to turn and run away, there was nothing he could do.

Beatrice: "Did you think that by reaching a hand into the darkness, you can pull Betty out? Did you think you can give Betty the answer to this endless dead-end, I suppose?"

Subaru: "..."

Beatrice: "If you... can really do it... Then why... Why..."

She lowered her head, and her words were interspersed with sobs.

Unable to see Beatrice's expression, Subaru felt his heart being overwhelmed by a nondescript darkness. He couldn't feel the ground beneath his feet, as though he had lost the way to Beatrice though she was close enough to touch.

Fear and hesitation overtook him, and through that silence, Beatrice looked up once more.

Glaring into his eyes, she opened her mouth, teeth bared,

Beatrice: “—Then why did you leave Betty here for four-hundred years, all alone!?”

Subaru: “———Hk.”

Beatrice: “All alone! Always! Always always always, Betty was alone, waiting for this meaningless time to pass! I was lonely! I was scared! I was abandoned, unable to fulfill my purpose, unable to abide by my vow, unable to even decay with the passage of time... I must spend an eternity alone here, that much I’ve already realized!”

Huge tears began to fall from her eyes.

The large droplets trickled down her cheeks, and dripped from her chin to the floor. Every drop striking upon the ground was a merciless shock ramming into Subaru’s heart,

Beatrice: “You want to help me!? Save me!? Then why didn’t you come sooner!? Why did you abandon Betty!? If you say those gentle words now, then why didn’t you keep hold of Betty from the start!? Why did you let go!? Why! Why! Why did you leave Betty all alone!?”

Her words were like daggers, like flames, like steel, and each left a wound on Subaru’s heart. In every sense, and in every way, every ounce of pain they carried tore at Subaru.

But Beatrice’s claims were all too unreasonable.

Four-hundred years— For the greater part of that time she spent alone Subaru had no say in the matter. Subaru had only met her two months ago, and, going by her standards, he would have been too late no matter how quickly he came to her. If he wanted to protest, he could have simply said that.

But there was no point in protesting, because who could that possibly help?

Whether it was Beatrice or Subaru, it wouldn’t help anyone. Only now, was Subaru made aware of how he had neglected how much time the girl Beatrice spent waiting.

Four-hundred years. —It was four-hundred years.

On the surface, there seemed to be nothing significant about that number.

In fantasy fictions, four-hundred years isn't even that big of a number. There were stories out there that ranged across a ridiculous number of years, some that spanned the entire history of that world. Compared to those, four-hundred years is nothing.

But was he an idiot? Was he really an idiot? How hopelessly stupid did he have to be?

In front of a girl who had spent an actual four-hundred years alone, kept at a loss as to the purpose of her existence like some unanswerable riddle, how much of it could he possibly fathom from those three simple words? How much could he understand? How much could he feel?

And just how much could Subaru's flimsy words heal her of her four-hundred years of loneliness?

Beatrice: "Asking for help... Wanting things to change... That wish had already withered in those four-hundred years, I suppose..."

Subaru: "..."

Beatrice: "Did you think you were the only person who tried to take Betty away? Betty is a high-ranking Spirit. In search of that power, countless humans have endeavored to take Betty from this place."

It was the first he had heard of this. That there had been humans just like Subaru who tried to make Beatrice leave the Forbidden Library. As for whether they succeeded, her presence here was answer enough.

Seeing Beatrice watch him with her feeble gaze, Subaru quickly shook his head,

Subaru: "D—don't group me along with those guys! I just want to..."

Beatrice: "Like you, there were also those among their number who did not care about Betty's power, who merely wanted to save a person in front of their eyes... Naïve as that may be, I suppose."

Subaru: "———"

Beatrice: "But none of them could bring Betty out of this place. It was only natural, I suppose."

"After all", Beatrice sighed with a faint, ephemeral smile,

Beatrice: “The Contract binding Betty to this place cannot be abolished by such half-baked convictions. The Contract that has bound Betty to her task for four-hundred years... is not so easily broken by mere human whims.”

Subaru: “Then... what will I have to...”

Beatrice: “—Put Betty above all else.”

The words she said to him were so quiet, and yet so sharp.

So sharp that they were like needles puncturing into Subaru’s eardrums.

Subaru: “Wh... at...?”

Beatrice: “Put Betty above all else. Think first of Betty. Choose Betty over everything. And thus, overwrite the Contract. Paint it over. And erase it from existence. Take Betty from here. Lead me by the hand. And embrace me.”

Subaru: “———”

Beatrice: “That is something you will never be capable of.”

That was Beatrice’s true, desperate, and heartfelt wish.

A far too heavy request, and one not easily granted.

Beatrice: “You have already chosen who is foremost in your heart, I suppose. Whether it’s the silver-haired girl, or the blue-haired maid... Either way, you will never cast those two aside and put Betty above them. It simply cannot be.”

Subaru: “Emilia... Rem...”

Beatrice: “The Contract is absolute. Absolute, I suppose. Aside from fulfilling its terms, it is impossible to replace a sealed Contract without paying the corresponding price. Betty does not believe that the promise has been fulfilled, I suppose. And so, the only way to be released other than by fulfilling the Contract is...!”



Illustration from Volume 12, coloring by DdukaE ([source](#))

At the mention of the two girls, it was as if something hard had struck Subaru's heart.

Whenever he thought of them, Subaru's heart would pound, scream, and burst into heat. It was already the immutable reply carved into his very soul.

Beatrice: "So, break Betty's Contract... and destroy this useless body drifting through the meaningless flow of time..."

Subaru: "Your Contract... is it really that important to you? If you hate it so much... can't you will yourself to change it...?"

Unable to answer her, he didn't know what to say to Beatrice.

And so, Subaru took the cowardly approach and chose to divert her question away.

In that instant, a color of disappointment flickered across Beatrice's pupils. And Subaru immediately realized that he had made a fatal mistake.

Beatrice: "That is... Betty's reason to live."

Subaru: "The Contract...?"

Beatrice: "Betty was born for this Contract, and lives for this Contract. It was the task I was given at my birth, a Contract I have never fulfilled for as long as I have lived... and you want me to selfishly break it... Is that what you're saying, I suppose?"

Subaru: "It's not selfish at all! You've already tried your best for four-hundred years, didn't you!? Who can blame you when you've stayed true to your promise for so long!? Who'd have the right to? You've already done enough...!"

Beatrice: "And accomplished nothing! If I throw away the purpose of my existence and the reason I was born for, what will I have to live for!? No one will blame me!? Betty will blame herself! The Spirit Beatrice will never forgive such a cowardly way to live!!"

Subaru stomped with his trembling legs and grabbed the small girl by her shoulders, shouting. But the girl looked up and screamed back even louder, breaking away once more. The strength of the frail little girl pushed Subaru's body backwards.

Powerless. What did she mean? He couldn't understand what he was seeing.

Beatrice: "To Spirits, Contracts are absolute! A Contract sealed between Contractor and Spirit is the most important thing there is! It's the same with Nii-cha! Why else do you think he puts that silver-haired girl above everything else! He places her above everything! He loves her above everything! Between Betty and that girl, he wouldn't think twice about choosing her! Not even Nii-cha would put Betty first!"

As a fellow Spirit, there was no one closer to Beatrice than Puck.

It was a friendship that had developed over four-hundred years in each other's company, one far beyond what human lifespans could possibly manage.

What must Beatrice have thought of Puck? And what did Puck think of Beatrice? Subaru couldn't be sure.

But Beatrice herself already had the answer to that question.

Beatrice had more than enough time to contemplate the answer.

Panting, her shoulders shuddering, even her neat curls have become disheveled. Enormous tear drops emerged in her large, round eyes, and her trembling lips were still repeating her desperate plea.

So small, she's only a child, Subaru thought. How could anyone leave a little girl like this?

Beatrice: "You... aren't the person mentioned in the Contract. I know that, I suppose..."

Subaru: "-----"

Beatrice: "But can you become That Person for me? Or, if not become that person, then use some other way to save Betty, I suppose?"

Subaru: "-----"

His answer never came.

He couldn't make her some casual promise, or impulsively refuse her. In the short time he spent here, Subaru had managed to understand just a small portion of the mystery that was Beatrice.

Yet, if he were to truly understand her loneliness, he would have had to pass four-hundred years in solitude just like she had.

But something like that was fundamentally impossible for a human. Her distress, her loneliness, and her sorrow were too far beyond Subaru's reach.

Beatrice: "Betty knows better than anyone just how impossible that is."

Subaru: "Beatrice..."

Beatrice: "So please, kill Betty. With your own hands. Suicide is a violation of the Contract, so a Spirit is forbidden to do so, I suppose. So even dying is something I can't do myself."

Subaru: "But why... me...?"

Reaching out her hands, Beatrice pleaded once more.

Hesitating before her outstretched hands and afraid that he might give in to her request, Subaru covered his face with his palms,

Subaru: "Your death, at the end of four-hundred years... Why are you leaving it to me...?"

Beatrice: "Why... I suppose."

Sobbing, whimpering, evading, Beatrice could have slapped down Subaru's question. But she chose not to. As if she herself didn't know the reason, she slightly tilted her head.

And after a small lapse of silence, she slowly nodded.

Beatrice: "—Yes, I think I know."

Subaru: "..."

Beatrice: "Betty... wants to leave her death to you... because—"

If he listened to her answer, he would have no escape.

Of that, he was certain. He lifted his head. If he doesn't plug his ears and refuse to listen to her answer, unless he holds a hand over her mouth and prevents her from speaking—

But he was too late. He had noticed it too late. There was no way he could stop it now. Beatrice's lips shall announce the answer.

And, in that moment—

???: "Sorry to interrupt when you're in the middle of your conversation."

Hearing a voice that he should not have heard, a chill ran down Subaru's spine as he spun around where he stood.

And there, he saw it.

???: "—What if I were to become That Person for you, I suppose?"

Holding two blood-drenched Kukri knives dangling at her side, a jet-black murderer stood at the doorway.

Arc 4 Chapter 62 - Massacre at Roswaal Mansion

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 12, Chapter 3 “A Four-Hundred-Year-Old Cry”, Parts 5-6
(loosely adapted)

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken – [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

Seeing the woman standing in the doorway, a shiver ran through Subaru’s entire body.

Even for Subaru, who had experienced so many bouts of desperation and death since his arrival in the parallel world, this was an existence that inspired a strange kind of dread.

Donning a black feathered cloak, the dynamic curvatures of her body were packaged in jet-black attire. Her black hair, the same color as Subaru’s, such a rarity in this world, was woven into a French braid. The far corners of her eyes were angled downwards, while a seductive smile adorned her almost gentle expression.

If it weren’t for the blood-drenched blades casually dangling from her hands, she might have been mistaken for a lady straight out of a portrait— instead of this murdering monster that was Subaru’s worst nightmare. The first person who killed him. The Bowel Hunter— Elsa Granhiert.

Subaru: “How are... you here!?”

Elsa: “—Oh my, I was wondering where I had smelled that smell before? How has your body been faring since we last parted? Have you been taking good care of your bowels for me?”

As if having just noticed the tongue-tied Subaru’s presence, Elsa lifted her brows and slightly tilted her head.

Just from her answer to his question, it was already clear that no conversation could be had between them. Taking care of one’s bowels isn’t something normal people would consider suggesting. Hearing her

make such a request like it was a matter of course left no doubt in his mind that this woman before his eyes was a lunatic.

What's more, she was a lunatic of a completely different breed than Petelgeuse Romanée-Conti.

Feeling all the muscles in his body tightening, Subaru strained his nerves watching Elsa's every movement.

But the combat strength of this madwoman was such that she had taken a blow from the Sword Saint, Reinhard, and lived. No matter how much Subaru sharpened his nerves, chances were she could take him down before he'd even have time to react.

Beatrice: "—Who gave you permission to be here, I suppose."

Suddenly, a voice came from behind Subaru, addressing Elsa.

The one who asked this impassive question was Beatrice. She remained as before, facing against Subaru, except all traces of her tears had vanished from her face.

Hearing the girl's question, Elsa brushed her hand through her long, dark hair.

Elsa: "It wasn't locked or anything, all I did was open the door and come in? If you're having such an important conversation, you shouldn't forget to lock next time."

Beatrice: "That's not what I meant. This is Betty's Forbidden Library, and you have entered without my permission... Aside from this man, not many others could do this, I suppose. How did you manage this, in fact?"

Elsa: "Ah, that's simple."

As Beatrice tossed a glance towards Door Crossing's other exception, Subaru, Elsa nodded as if having understood her question. Then, she gestured to the opened doorway,

Elsa: "Your spatial-isolation magic... uses doors as its medium, right? A door-linking spell that connects closed doors with other closed doors?"

Beatrice: “Yes. The Forbidden Library is potentially connected to any door in the mansion. Unless Betty permits it, it should be impossible to find it, I suppose. So how did you...”

Elsa: “Then it’s easy. Seeing how it uses closed doors as the medium... if I just opened every door, that would eliminate all the other possibilities, right?”

Beatrice: “———!”

Elsa spelled out her straight-forward solution to Beatrice’s Door Crossing.

It was indeed as she said. Beatrice’s Door Crossing was a spatial transition magic that linked closed doors with one another. That is, it could not link to doors that were already open. Since there was a finite number of doors in the mansion, once all the other doors were opened, the last one remaining could only lead to the Forbidden Library. But, in order to do this,

Subaru: “You’d have to open every door in the mansion... and no one tried to stop you...?”

But the moment he spoke, Subaru realized the full extent of his stupidity.

Or rather, that he had been averting his eyes from the truth that he didn’t want to see.

Subaru: “On... your knife... whose blood is that?”

The blades of Elsa’s Kukri knives were coated in congealing blood. Judging from the droplets still dripping from their tips, one might imagine that they had only just sliced open their prey. That, combined with his existing assumptions, gave Subaru more than enough reason to imagine the worst.

Watching the color drain from Subaru’s lips, Elsa traced her finger over the side of her blade, and then licked her bloodied finger clean.

Elsa: “I wonder whose it is?”

Subaru: “You...”

Elsa: “I’ll give you a hint. She’s dressed as a maid.”

There were three people in the mansion. They were all dressed as maids. No, Rem would be sleeping in her nightgown. So, she's out as a candidate. That leaves only two.

Elsa: "Hint number two. Her hair wasn't long."

Petra's hair was shoulder-length. Frederica's hair was long.

—Subaru's throat inhaled in preparation for the scream that was to come.

Elsa: "Hint number three— «Subaru, Subaru!», she cried as she died."

Subaru: "ELSAAAAAAAA—!!!!"

Baring his teeth as he lowered his stance, Subaru charged towards Elsa head on.

Elsa casually straightened her limbs to meet his charge, pointing the tip of her right-hand blade at the oncoming Subaru's eye—

Elsa: "—Ara?"

Subaru: "Like anyone's gonna charge a monster like you from the front!"

Elsa groaned as if taken by surprise.

In front of her, Subaru lowered his body, scraping his hand against the floor before swinging it in an upwards arc. Caught in the trajectory of his arm, a stack of Gospel pages went up fluttering.

In an instant, tens of white pages blocked Elsa's view of Subaru. Immediately drawing in a breath, Subaru concentrated every ounce of his Mana into the center of his stomach, and,

Subaru: "—Shamac!!!!"

A plume of black smoke billowed out, completely obscuring the space between Elsa and Subaru.

Though it paled in comparison to the Shamac he used against Julius, he knew from experience that it would be effective against Elsa. Unlike last time, when he completely expelled all the Mana inside his body, this time, it only left a general sense of fatigue, an indication that he was getting better at utilizing his Mana.

Subaru: “Beatrice!”

Quickly turning around, Subaru grabbed the on-looking Beatrice by the arm. Though for a moment, she made an effort to resist, she didn’t manage to escape Subaru’s grip.

Forcefully pulling her almost weightless body, Subaru embraced the small girl into his arms and launched himself back into the Shamac.

—Confusion. Deprived of vision, sound, sensation, and left with only darkness.

The feeling of his footfalls had become Subaru’s everything, the entirety of his world.

In the span between one foot left the ground and his other foot landed, Subaru was completely abandoned by the world. His left foot lands. He was linked to the world. His left foot leaves. He was alone. His right foot lands. He was linked. He was alone. He was linked. He was alone. He felt something struggling in his arms. But he didn’t let go. He mustn’t leave her alone. He was linked. He was linked. He was linked.

Subaru: “—Phaa!”

The next instant, as if popping his head out of a water’s surface, the darkness abruptly fell away.

In his clearing vision, Subaru found himself in the mansion’s hallway. The red carpet lining the halls could only mean that they’ve dashed out of the Library.

They have bypassed Elsa at the door and escaped.

Subaru: “Knew that would work—!”

He knew that when hit with Shamac from the front, the battle-hardened Elsa would try to shoot Subaru through the smokescreen thinking that he would be running away. By going against her expectation and running towards her, Subaru passed right by Elsa through the door she had left open.

Subaru: “Kinda wanna say «Nailed it!», but...”

This was no time to congratulate himself.

She didn't know how long Shamac would last, but as soon as Elsa realizes that Subaru isn't in front of her, she will immediately turn back in pursuit.

Roughly kicking the door shut behind him, Door Crossing's link was severed. But, depending on Beatrice, Subaru couldn't be sure if the Forbidden Library was still connected to his immediate surroundings.

Subaru: "Beatrice! Link the door to different room in the house..."

Beatrice: "I was going to even without you telling me, I suppose. Also, close some doors around us, that'll buy us some time."

Subaru: "Shit, that's right!"

Answering the disdainful words of the girl in his arms, Subaru scrambled to shut the closest doors around him. While closing each door he peeked inside, but found nothing of note.

He didn't know how much of Elsa's words could be believed, but—

Subaru: "What to do... What to do what to do what to do what to do what to do—"

The questions were endless.

Why was Elsa here now? Out of all the loops, this was the earliest she had appeared in the mansion. It was the sixth day, then the fourth, and now the second— no matter when, Elsa always attacked on the same day Subaru arrived at the mansion.

He had already suspected this before. But now, after hearing Elsa's statements in the Library, that suspicion was turned into conviction. But if that was the case, then why—

Subaru: "Why not wait one more day... or just wait a few more hours!"

That night, Petra would have been brought back to the village.

Subaru was already half-resigned to the fact that Elsa would attack the mansion. The sight of Petra's lifeless corpse remained seared into the back of his eyes. So this time he was resolved to place her far away from the carnage. Yet, even so, evil arrived sooner than his countermeasures could be carried out, and the girl could not escape her fate.

Subaru: "It's not over yet. There's no need to give up now. Even if she has some overpowered setup, there's still a chance. There has to be. How can I lose hope now...!"

Beatrice: "It's not so much hope as it is reluctance to let go, I suppose..."

Subaru: "Shut up! Just be quiet and let me carry you! That lunatic wants to kill you too, you know. She's the kind of pervert who'll open your belly with her knife and get turned on by seeing what's inside!"

Beatrice: "Wanting to see a Spirit's intestines... that's just bad taste."

While Subaru muttered in agreement under his breath, Beatrice suddenly slipped out of his arms and landed herself on the hallway floor. She lightly patted off her dress, and,

Beatrice: "So, what do you plan to do now, I suppose?"

Subaru: "It's not about what I'm planning. The priority is to check if Petra and Rem are safe. And then... Either way, we'll escape the mansion together. Unless, you want to try and fight her?"

Beatrice: "...If that thing came to kill Betty, if I just don't resist, then I'll get my wish..."

Subaru: "I knew you'd say that, that's why I dragged you out... If you still won't give up that thought, I'll just have to carry you out of here. So which will it be?"

Looking down at Beatrice who was almost half his height, Subaru pressured her to choose. That said, he wasn't really offering her a choice. Even if she decided to stay behind, he would still drag her out by force.

As if having picked up on Subaru's intention, Beatrice exhaled a sigh,

Beatrice: "Even if I can't choose the place of my death, I should at least choose who kills me, I suppose."

Subaru: "How about we discuss that once we're settled down somewhere safe. Let's go!"

Seeing that Beatrice was willing to follow him, Subaru took her by the hand and started running. Trailing behind him in her cumbersome dress, Beatrice struggled to keep up with her short little steps. They didn't go ten paces before,

Subaru: “Aaaah, come on! I’m picking you up!”

He pulled her up by the wrist and took her into his arms once more.

Beatrice was a lot lighter than she looked. He didn’t know if this was because she was a Spirit, or if it was just because of her stunted growth.

Beatrice: “...Let go, I suppose.”

Subaru: “If we go at your speed, she’ll catch us straight away! It’s faster if I just carry you! Besides——”

Even as Beatrice voiced her rejection in his arms, her hands gripped onto the front of Subaru’s jacket as if seeking something to rely on. Noticing this, Subaru fell silent, and neither affirmed nor denied nor commented on the matter.

This is enough, he thought at the time.

Subaru: “Anyway, before Elsa shows up... we better find Petra and Rem!”

Beatrice: “I thought there’s one more maid in the mansion.”

Subaru: “Frederica... It’s better if we don’t meet just now... I think...”

Subaru’s last words trailed away as he shook the blond-haired maid out of his mind. Beatrice furrowed her brows at his reaction, but didn’t say anything in the end.

Right now, he wanted to avoid meeting Frederica. Once he had confirmed that the other two girls were safe, he would go find her, and ask her then.

If what Subaru imagined was true, then he was sure of it——

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——Petra was on the dining table, lined up alongside the tableware.

The white tablecloth had been dyed dark-red with Petra at its center. Some time had already passed, and the spilled blood had begun to turn a hue of black, which only served to darken the macabre sight.

Subaru: “Petr... a...”

With faltering, unsteady steps, Subaru slowly approached the table.

Laying there in the center was Petra. A tearful expression of agony and horror had congealed on her lovely face, and her eyes were open as if searching for something at the very end. Blood was still leaking from the corner of her half-open lips, and the fatal wound was of course a deep gash opened in her waist.

The maid’s dress that had adorned her so sweetly and fairy-like when she spun in front of Subaru— was cut open from the chest to the lower abdomen, while the spilled blood and intestines further lightened the young-girl’s body.

Subaru: “———Ugh.”

Something rose in the depths of his throat. Not to vomit, but to sob.

He felt a searing heat in the back of his eyes, and before it could overflow, he reached out his hand to Petra’s face. Her expression remained twisted and frozen in fear. The least he could do was to close her eyes, and then, like he had done before, Subaru took off his jacket and placed it over her body.

Just how many times had he failed to save her, and resorted to this superficial atonement?

How many times had he known this would happen and still let this child die?

And how many times would this girl have to suffer for nothing more than her fondness of him?

Subaru: “I’m sorry... I’m sorry, I’m sorry... Petra...”

Even his muttered apology felt hollow.

With no one to protect her, she encountered the hideous murderer here, and was mercilessly killed whilst calling Subaru’s name.

His heart might shatter from grief. And his body might burst into flames.

If hatred could kill a person, Subaru could have killed Elsa a million times before his hatred ran out.

Such was the depth of the sin she had committed. And he will make her realize it, no matter what.

Subaru: “For that, I can’t let this try just end like this...”

Beatrice: “This try...?”

Subaru: “Talking to myself. I don’t want to leave Petra like this... but there’s nothing we can do right now. Let’s go find Rem first. We’ll take her and leave the mansion. You still can’t use Door Crossing?”

Beatrice: “For that, we’ll need to pass through the Forbidden Library. I’m guessing the door is currently held open, I suppose.”

Subaru: “—Is that how it is...”

The way to shut down Door Crossing is quite simple.

First, open all the doors in the mansion to eliminate as many options as possible. Then, simply leave the door to the Forbidden Library open, and thus prevent any other potential doors from linking to it. Even if a stick was left behind to keep the door from closing, Beatrice would not be able to summon the Library to her.

Subaru: “Do you know where the Forbidden Library is connected to right now?”

Beatrice: “Of course— Right now it’s in the west wing, a guest room on the third floor, I suppose.”

If the door was in the West Wing, there was still some distance between there and the dining room in the main building. But since the door was open, that would mean Elsa had already left the Forbidden Library.

With that murderer’s nose, it wouldn’t take long before she found Subaru.

There was no time.

Subaru: “We don’t have time to panic right now. Either way, let’s hurry up and find Rem...”

Wiping away the tears seeping from his eyes with the back of his hand, Subaru looked to the direction of his destination. Rem would be sleeping in her room in the maid's quarters of the East Wing. If Elsa started her search in the west wing, then she shouldn't have gotten there yet.

However, this was all limited just to Elsa.

Subaru: "There's a good chance that Frederica is there..."

Knowing how much Rem's well-being meant to Subaru, Frederica would have figured that Subaru would go to her after slipping away from Elsa. In that case, it was very likely that she had gotten there first.

Watching Subaru holding his chin in thought, Beatrice narrowed her eyes.

Beatrice: "This has been bothering me, in fact... Are you suspecting that maid, I suppose?"

Subaru: "...I don't want to suspect her, but..."

Subaru answered Beatrice's question with a feeble nod.

Elsa's attack on Roswaal's mansion— was probably due to Frederica's betrayal. Of that, Subaru was half convinced.

This was the third time Subaru encountered Elsa in Roswaal's mansion.

The last two encounters had been on the sixth and fourth day, both after a few days had passed since his departure. However, this time, he had returned after only two days, and yet there she was again.

Each and every time, Elsa appeared as if she was waiting for Subaru's return. As for how she managed to do this, Subaru could only suspect the existence of a mole.

Subaru: "The same day I return to the mansion, Elsa is led inside... I had thought that a trip to the mountain cabin would be a part of it, but..."

Subaru had suspected from the start that Elsa was hiding in the mountain cabin and was led inside by Frederica. So this time, when he got back, he asked her if she would be "heading to the cabin in the mountains".

But he didn't notice anything suspicious about Frederica's answer or demeanor, and so he put it off for the moment, deciding that he was overthinking it.

Subaru: "But there's more than one way she could've done it... and it's not like I can read her mind. I might have been duped and haven't realized it."

Subaru had thought that he had concealed his suspicion from her. But instead, she must have sensed his wariness and acted with extra caution.

That was Subaru's mistake, and the result was this girl's life being taken from her for a second time. Petra's death was entirely Subaru's fault, for having failed to take her away from here. In fact, it was no different than if Subaru had killed her himself.

Subaru: "But... Petra looked up to you...!"

"Frederica-oneesama", he could remember Petra calling her tutor.

Didn't it hurt her to know that Petra, who so adored her, was killed at the hand of that murderer?

What was she thinking when she took part in this?

Subaru: "The clincher... is her method for breaking Beatrice's Gate Crossing. Honestly, I was surprised how she managed to break it with that child-like method."

Beatrice: "...Betty didn't think it could be so easily broken either. It's not a method one could think of just off the top of one's head, I suppose."

Subaru: "Given enough time, I might have thought of it too... but that's the problem, time. She couldn't have come up with it unless she knew about you and the mechanisms behind Door Crossing beforehand. There was no way Elsa could've thought of it then and there. So she must have learned it from someone on the inside."

Beatrice: "You seem to be well acquainted with that crazy woman. Where did you meet, I suppose?"

Subaru: "She kinda cut my belly open in the Capital... Right, it was the first wound you treated me for, remember?"

Thinking back on it, Elsa was the reason Subaru got to enter Roswaal's mansion in the first place. "Ah", Beatrice nodded as if having understood.

In any case, this was no time for reminiscences.

Subaru: "Anyway, we have to get to Rem. If Frederica's there... can I count on your help?"

Beatrice: "You don't even have the backbone to protect the girl you love yourself, I suppose? To be placed foremost in such a man's heart... I shudder just thinking about it."

Subaru: "If feelings can knock whales from the sky I'll knock down as many as you want, but the world isn't so kind to me, you know."

Despite her disdainful remark, Beatrice seemed to have accepted his request. Even this banter was a display of Beatrice's consideration for Subaru. Most likely, she did this to take his mind off Petra.

Unlike Subaru, who had been oblivious to Beatrice's sorrow and even now could not offer her a single solution, Beatrice was far cleverer. And that was why he was always relying on her.

Subaru: "Let's go."

Beatrice: "Mm, alright, I suppose."

Naturally, Beatrice held out her hand, and was hoisted up into Subaru's arms without objections. Lifting up the light little girl, Subaru started running as he did before.

Bounding for the east wing, Subaru tried his best to silence his steps, even though he knew that it was probably pointless. It didn't appear as though Elsa had come through here as he darted up the stairs to the second floor, and then the third. Timidly popping his head into the hallway, he checked for any shadows around the destined room—

Subaru: "——"

Spotting a figure outside the room, Subaru quickly ducked back his head.

Seeing Beatrice quietly looking up at him in his arms, Subaru nodded, and stuck out his head once again— There seemed to be a tall person leaning against the door.

Even from afar, there was no mistaking the golden hair and the maid's uniform.

It was Frederica. Just as he thought, she was standing outside Rem's bedroom, waiting for Subaru's arrival.

Subaru: "What do we do...? Pretend nothing's happened and say hello? If she hasn't met up with Elsa yet, she might not know we're on to her..."

Beatrice: "If your prediction is correct, then the moment that maid invited the enemy into the mansion, she'd already had no reason to care about our feelings. Besides, when you last parted with that maid, you were entering the Forbidden Library, I suppose. The moment you stepped out, you already have no more excuses."

Subaru: "In that case, we'll just have to break through from the front."

Frederica's weapon of choice— was what looked to be a pair of clawed gauntlets. From both her bearing and the fact that she was Garfiel's older sister, even if Subaru hadn't personally seen her in action, he could imagine how powerful she must be. Their chances of victory from a frontal assault was almost non-existent.

Subaru: "I'll release Shamac right away, and if we manage to surprise her, can you hit her with some ranged magic attacks...? Even if we can't fight her, we're good as long as we can get her to retreat..."

Beatrice: "That's way too lenient for a traitor, I suppose. You can't face an opponent who's out to kill you without having the same resolve yourself."

Listening to Beatrice remark coldly, though he knew that she was right, Subaru was still reluctant to follow her advice. Even knowing that the person in question was a traitor, it was still someone who had once treated him as a friend. For as long as Subaru could remember those times, it would never be such a clear-cut matter.

Even if, purely in terms of consequence, Frederica was deeply responsible for Petra's death.

Subaru: "Beatrice. I'll block her line of sight with Shamac. I'll count on you to maybe lightly shoot her with something."

Beatrice: “—You realize things could go badly if we go too easy on her, I suppose?”

Subaru: “There are just some things I still want to ask her. Don’t overthink it.”

“Isn’t it a bit late for that?”, Beatrice’s expression seemed to say, but seeing Subaru lower his head, she sighed through her nostrils and said nothing.

Reminding himself not to impose on her, Subaru took a deep breath, and opened and closed his palms. His body was still somewhat fatigued, but he should still be able to manage one more Shamac—

Subaru: “Hold it together, body of mine— Shamac!”

Dashing into the hallway, before Frederica could turn around, black smoke shot out from Subaru’s outstretched palm.

Without fail, it filled the space between Subaru and Frederica just as it had done in the Library. But, along the way, feeling his head grow heavy from the excess loss of Mana, Subaru fell to his knees and collapsed to the floor.

Stepping out beside him, Beatrice held her hands in front of her as she advanced. Chanting something under her breath, a hollow hole warped from the atmosphere, from which emerged a spear shrouded in pale purple flame.

Its burning tip causing the atmosphere to tremble, the amethyst spear levitated into the air— Ignoring Subaru’s protest that the magic was clearly lethal, Beatrice fired the spear into the shadow—

Beatrice: “...Something’s off.”

Beatrice tilted her head, muttering.

Subaru didn’t understand her reaction, but the spear came to a halt midair, and with a turn of her outstretched finger, Beatrice made the spear swipe left and right.

With this simple movement, the darkness from Subaru’s Shamac was dispelled. That was merely because, being a Yin magic user herself, Beatrice’s influence was far greater than Subaru’s.

Seeing the fruit of his exhausting efforts so easily brushed away, Subaru looked on stupidly. But that sentiment soon fell away.

Once he realized the reason why Beatrice had halted her attack.

Subaru: “-----”

With the shadows clearing from the hallway, Subaru advanced straight towards Frederica.

Dragging along his exhausted, mana-deprived body, at the speed of a turtle’s crawl, Subaru made his way to her feet. There was no more need for caution. For she made no reaction to his approach. None at all.

—She would never react to anything again.

Subaru: “...why.”

Frederica had died, standing guard in front of Rem’s room.

Her stomach was pierced by a Kukri knife, nailing her to the door. On her lifelessly dangling arms were her gauntlets. As evidence that it was a hard-fought battle, her clothes were riddled with cuts.

Frederica’s body was already cold, and her expression indicated that her soul had long departed. Her stiffened face spoke of bitterness and regret, and Subaru could tell that she had defended the door with her life.

In other words, Frederica had fought to the end so that the attacker would not enter this room.

She would have no reason to do this if she was the one who led the culprit here.

Subaru: “I completely doubted you... when you...”

Covering his face with his palm, Subaru did his best to take in the reality before his eyes.

Frederica died with blade wounds littering her body. Now that he had seen her like this, how could he say that she was an informant and a traitor?

Was this the fruit of his distrust? He was so eager to accuse her, when in fact, he just wanted an excuse to lessen his own guilt. He had to admit it.

Subaru: “—I was wrong... wasn’t I.”

Frederica was not a traitor.

She fought to the death, guarding Rem until the end. Judging from the coldness of her body, she probably died before Petra in the dining room.

She would have had no time to lead Elsa to the Forbidden Library.

Subaru: “...Rem.”

A gaping blankness took over his skull.

Uncoiling his scrambled thoughts, the first thing that came to mind was that lovely, sleeping girl inside the room which Frederica had been guarding.

Frederica’s stiffening body had grown heavy, and prying her from the door was heavy work. Subaru had to exercise his utmost caution to avoid harming her any further. Though his fingers were as impatient as his heart.

But, like a betrayal of Subaru’s considerations,

???: “—Finally found you.”

At the end of the hallway, a black shadow slipped into view.

Elsa stooped low with her French braid swinging, holding her palm against the floor, watching them with eyes wet with rapacious murder. Her gaze ran up and down his body, petrifying Subaru in place. Not letting that opening escape, Elsa’s shadow darted through the hallway.

That soundless advance was none other than the approach of death.

Beatrice: “You’d be making a huge mistake if you think we’ll go down so easily.”

But there was someone who blocked Elsa’s advance.

Beatrice lightly lifted her hands to where her amethyst spear was waiting, with its aim locked on Elsa. The spear that had been held from its purpose screeched in exalted glee at a new target for its destruction.

Elsa: "That's quite a dangerous toy for someone so small."

Beatrice: "Whether it's a children's toy or not, your body can be the test of that."

Elsa smiled in the face of this diabolical magic. And, as if to wipe that smile from her face, Beatrice's amethyst spear shot out.

The spear's velocity far surpassed that of the icicles Subaru had seen Emilia fire. Although there was only one, it lined up directly with Elsa's trajectory as she dashed forward with the same momentum— But, bending down with her chest nearly sliding along the floor, Elsa evaded the strike.

Elsa: "Too bad. Your aim and speed still need some work."

Feeling the weapon graze past the back of her head, Elsa muttered without a trace of fear as she turned her underhanded Kukri knife towards Beatrice.

The blade's dull gleam approached Beatrice's body, threatening to cleave her tiny figure in two—

Beatrice: "You're the one who hasn't thought this through, human."

Just before it could happen, Beatrice clenched her open palm, and the amethyst spear swelled. Continuing down its course after having missed its target, the spear bulged at the end of the hallway and burst like a ruptured balloon behind the halting Elsa.

Elsa: "—This!"

The exploded spear's splinters turned into smaller spears, surrounding Elsa from all directions.

Though they were called smaller spears, they were each no bigger than Subaru's index finger. Their countless multitudes flooded the space, all their tips pointing at Elsa.

And then,

Beatrice: “This shall be your punishment for trespassing into Betty’s Forbidden Library, I suppose—
Drawn and quartered, would be a fitting end for the likes of you.”

Proclaiming this merciless sentence, she fired the amethyst spears.

Arc 4 Chapter 63 - Empathy Towards Death

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 12, Chapter 3 “A Four-Hundred-Year-Old Cry”, Parts 5-6
(loosely adapted)

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken – [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#)

The sounds of amethyst shards piercing into flesh rang out in quick succession, as a mist of glittering fragments dispersing from the impact drowned out the hall.

Countless spears shot towards Elsa’s body from every direction, and she would have been punctured with a million pores.

“Victory is assured”. But even as he watched the murderer being crushed under the overwhelming power of Beatrice’s magic, he couldn’t stifle the ominous feeling exploding inside his chest.

—What was it, what was it that he had forgotten? There was something that he mustn’t forget.

What could it be? Even as he tried to pry it from his memories, the cascade of emotions turned him away.

Just what was Elsa’s goal in coming to the mansion? After finding Frederica’s body, his shame of having suspected her had thrown his heart into disarray. He had never quite accepted Petra’s death, nor could he suppress his anxiousness to confirm Rem’s safety behind the door. All these emotions screamed from the depths of his being. And Beatrice— what was it that he needed to tell Beatrice?

What was it? Subaru couldn’t find the answer to the question confounding his heart.

Subaru: “———”

And so, he missed the opportunity to prevent what he should have prevented.

Subaru: “—Egh, ah?”

An object flew out of the glistening radiance and dug deep into Subaru's right shoulder.

Looking towards the source of the pain, his thoughts turned red hot as he saw the blood pouring from the gash. His throat shrieked as if he was being strangled as the projectile's momentum pushed him off his feet, flat onto the floor.

Beatrice: "How...!? That was a direct hit I suppose!?"

Seeing the wounded Subaru, Beatrice cried out in shock.

Hearing Beatrice's cry beneath his scorching thoughts, it was only then that he remembered. He remembered it. Yes. It was a direct hit. There was no doubt about it. But,

Subaru: "Elsaaaaaaaaaaa!!"

Elsa: "No need to cry out so passionately, I can hear you just fine."

From his hatred, inflamed by the pain, it was a rupturing scream unlike the shriek from before. And, in reply, amidst the falling crystals at the other end of the hallway— An alluring, unhurried voice answered, with no indication of the life or death exchange that had just transpired.

Beatrice: "She's uninjured... How's that possible."

Elsa: "If I was naked, I'd have probably died from that."

Watching Beatrice shake her head in disbelief, Elsa replied with her French braid swaying. Nothing about her looked like she had just taken a direct hit from Beatrice's magic. In fact, she appeared exactly as she did before.

Except, there was just one difference. She had cast off her feathered cloak and was now only wearing the black outfit underneath.

Subaru: "Her magic-nullifying cloak!"

Elsa: "It's already the second time you got to see it. Too bad you're a bit late to tell that girl about it."

Subaru: "Shit...!"

No single word could sufficiently express his regret as rage boiled beneath his pain.

Elsa's cloak had the ability to cancel one magical strike— That was something he had personally witnessed during their showdown inside the Capital.

The fact that Beatrice's strike came so suddenly, combined with their lack of coordination beforehand, had all led to this unforgivable blunder.

Beatrice: "Now that I know your trick, it's not so surprising anymore."

Elsa: "—Wonderful. Oh, just wonderful. Such strength, and so adorable. Unlike some girl who only knows how to whimper and cry, I am very much looking forward to the warmth of your bowels."

Beatrice's aura intensified once more as Elsa twirled the Kukri knife in her hand and smiled. From her words, accompanied by her bloodied smile— it was obvious just who "whimpering girl" was referring to. And the instant he realized it, Subaru's rage erupted.

Subaru: "What gives you the right to talk about Petra like that—!!"

The throwing knife jutting out of his right shoulder— was hooked at the tip to hinder its removal. Yet, gritting his teeth at the object buried in his flesh, Subaru tore it out in a single stroke.

Intense pain dyed his vision true-red, and he could feel his right arm being crippled of its functionality. And then, ignoring his injury, Subaru hurled the dislodged knife back at Elsa.

Though he had thrown it with all his strength, it was still a haphazard throw with no prior training.

The fact that it flew straight towards Elsa was already half a miracle, and the same went for its speed. But it was obvious that such an attack would have no effect on a murderer with agility beyond human comprehension.

Elsa: "I admire your guts, but if this is all y—"

Subaru: "I'll wring out every drop! SHAMAC—!!"

Elsa: "—!?"

As Elsa readied for the incoming attack, the third Shamac escaped Subaru's trembling throat.

Drawing out the last of his body's exhausted Mana after his first and second casts, Subaru expelled his life force through his inexperienced gate as payment for his chant.

Blood shot through his eyes and leaked from his nose. And then, the scream of his soul was answered.

Darkness spread through the center of the hallway, filling the space between him and Elsa. The knife that Subaru had thrown flew into the jet of smoke. Shooting through the obscuring darkness, it stayed its course towards Elsa— its trajectory shielded from view.

Subaru: "Please hit—!"

Elsa: "You startled me there, but it's not hard to just step out of the way."

Elsa threw in a complaint as she lowered her body to dodge out of its path.

Subaru's Shamac fell short of reaching her, and thus allowed her to evade at the last moment.

Flying out of the smokescreen, the small knife missed its original owner's body and continued down towards the end of the hall. And, just like that, Subaru's attack ended in vain— Or so it seemed, when,

Subaru: "Beako!!"

Beatrice: "Don't just call me that all of a sudden, I suppose—!"

If Subaru had been the only one present, the attack would have ended there.

But there were two people standing against Elsa—and the other girl had already used the time Subaru managed to buy to complete her next chant.

Beatrice: "Now allow me to show you— What Yin magic truly is."

???: "Wh—"

Had it been Subaru, or had it been Elsa who tried to say this?

Even that was impossible to tell after Beatrice's next action.

Clasping her small hands in front of her chest, Beatrice mouthed something under her breath. And, with a single phrase, the world was painted over.

Beatrice: “—Ul Shamac.”

—In a scale completely unlike Subaru’s imitation Yin magic, genuine darkness enveloped the mansion.

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When he came to his senses, Subaru was surrounded by pitch blackness.

Subaru: “———?”

Actually, even whether he was conscious was uncertain.

Where was he? Was he standing or was he seated? He couldn’t tell at all.

Up, down, left, right, even front or back was vague. Was he inhaling or was he exhaling? Was his blood still flowing? Was his heart still beating? Was he alive? Or was he already dead?

He couldn’t understand a thing. He couldn’t answer any of it. If he was inside his own Shamac, there would still be the sensations at the soles of his feet, and he could at least feel the movements inside his body. Even if he was denied all sensory input, there would still be his sharpened inner awareness to take its place.

But not in this darkness.

Here, it was as if he had dissolved into the shadow, and he couldn’t find himself if he tried.

Was he still in the form of a human? He could no longer be sure. He couldn’t sense the whereabouts of his hands, and so he couldn’t even touch himself to verify. Even if he wanted to check where he was, he wouldn’t know how to tell his legs to walk. What does it mean to walk? What does it mean to check?

—Most of all, just who was he supposed to be?

The line where he stopped and where others began was blurring.

The line where he stopped and where the world began was blurring.

Even the strength to think had melted away. Faded. Vanished.

And just like this, and just like this, and just like this—

The end had come—

The end had—

The end—

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???: "...It's about time you woke up, I suppose."

With the sound of a dry slap against his cheek, Subaru's consciousness was pulled back to reality.

He blinked, and groaned at the dazzling brightness piercing his returning vision. Hearing this, the pain that woke him slapped his cheeks again. Left and then right, once on each side.

Subaru: "Hey, you don't have to keep hitting me!"

Beatrice: "Just wanted to make sure you're awake. As for the second time, I don't know why, but it might've been reflex, I suppose."

Beatrice tossed him a cursory glance and gave him this disdainful reply, and only then did Subaru realize that he was lying on the floor.

Propping himself up, he checked over his body just to be sure. A sharp pain was throbbing in his right shoulder. Inadvertently looking towards its source, he saw the fresh wound asserting its existence with blood streaming from the gash.

Subaru: "Arghhh, hurts... Um, can you do like a targeted Shamac on me?"

Beatrice: "It's not that I couldn't, but that'd only make you temporarily forget the wound, even though it's still there. Moving it around without actually healing it usually results in death from loss of blood, I suppose."

Listening to Beatrice spell out that grisly possibility, Subaru pressed a hand over the wound and narrowed his eyes, saying "More importantly...", as if having remembered something,

Subaru: "What happened to Elsa? Since you look so relaxed about it... did you get her to retreat?"

Beatrice: "What're you talking about, I suppose?"

Subaru: "What do you mean what am I talking about? If she's still around, we can't be dawdling like this. I mean, sure, your Shamac was way more powerful than mine, but just with that..."

Beatrice: "If you're really that blind, then I kind of feel sorry for you, in fact."

Subaru anxiously furrowed his brows at Beatrice's baffled remark.

Beatrice might seem optimistic, but that was because she didn't know Elsa well enough to be afraid. If she only knew that murderer's depravity, she'd probably be as wary as Subaru.

Reading the thoughts written all over Subaru's face, this time, Beatrice let out a sigh as though she was truly astounded.

Seeing Subaru grow even more confused, Beatrice took a step to the side,

Beatrice: "If you still don't understand, just see for yourself, I suppose."

Subaru: "—Uh, woah?"

The scene uncovered before his eyes as Beatrice moved out of the way. Taking it in, he let out an involuntary groan.

Beatrice: "You were asking what happened to our terrifying opponent?"

Listening to Beatrice's triumphant boast, Subaru couldn't utter a word in reply.

Because, behind her— hanging from her limbs impaled by violet spears, crucified on the corridor wall, was Elsa's corpse with an amethyst stake driven through her heart like a vanquished vampire of old.

Corpse— Yes, there was no doubt about it. It was a corpse.

Subaru: "She's... dead?"

Beatrice: "There's a hole in her chest, and with that many injuries, if she's still alive... she'd be something other than a human."

With a shake of his head, weighed down by fatigue, Subaru got onto his feet.

The moment he stood, he was struck by an intense dizziness as his body tottered. But a hand reached out and gently stopped him from falling.

Subaru: "S—sorry..."

Beatrice: "It's fine..."

Beatrice turned away and did not look at him. Consigning some of his weight onto her palm, he dragged his feet towards Elsa's body.

Elsa's head hung limply, and her braid had been cut in half by a spear. Seeing her elbows and knees pinned to the wall, the brutality of the sight made him want to avert his eyes. But he still moved closer nonetheless, close enough to feel her breath, so he could check for himself if the murderer had truly breathed her last.

She wasn't breathing. He reached out his hand and touched her motionless body. It was still warm, but lacked any response unique to living beings. He touched her neck, but there wasn't the slightest pulse.

And, most importantly, despite being up close against the defenseless Subaru, she didn't make any attempt to strike.

Subaru: "S—she's... really dead, then...?"

Beatrice: "How many times are you going to ask that, I suppose."

Subaru: “Knowing what she’s capable of... I can’t breathe easy just like that, you know... It’s hard to believe... we actually did it...”

Standing in front of Elsa’s lifeless corpse, Subaru stared stupidly at their mirthless victory.

He had always thought of her as an enemy he would need to defeat, but he had never expected Beatrice to take her down single-handedly. Up to now, he had thought that it’d be impossible without Garfiel’s help.

Subaru: “Even Puck and Emilia together couldn’t defeat her...”

Beatrice: “...If Nii-cha was serious about it, she would’ve been no match for him. And Betty, in this perfect state, couldn’t possibly lose to the likes of a human, I suppose.”

If Puck was serious— That would probably mean turning into that giant lion-beast. Indeed, if he had turned into something that could freeze over the world just by existing, even Elsa wouldn’t stand a chance. On top of that, it would seem that Beatrice was a Spirit possessing similar powers.

To have lived for four-hundred years— There were simply far too many lifetimes between them.

Subaru: “Ri-right. Rem!”

Now that Elsa’s death was confirmed, Subaru suddenly jolted back towards the bedroom. Even now, Frederica’s body was still fixed to the door.

Carefully taking down her rigid body, Subaru placed his hand on the bloodstained doorknob. He drew in a breath, and gathered the courage to look inside. Then,

Subaru: “—Rem.”

The girl did not respond to his call.

But, lying on the bed, he could see that Rem was sleeping, her rhythmic breathing unaffected by the carnage that had taken place outside.

Elsa never set foot into this room.

No doubt, it was proof that in guarding this room with her life, Frederica's persistence had been even greater than the depravity of that murderer.

Subaru: "...I'm so sorry I doubted you... Frederica..."

Caressing the lovely, sleeping girl's forehead, Subaru apologized to the woman lying in the hallway once more. Although her soul had already departed this world, and Subaru's words would never reach her.

Beatrice: "So, what now, I suppose?"

Subaru: "We can't just leave Rem here. And Frederica, and Petra... we can only ask the Arlam villagers to take care of them."

Beatrice: "You won't do it yourself? It'd make that girl happier too, I suppose."

Subaru: "If were in a position where I could look after Rem myself, I would. But, I can't. I... have to take you to the Sanctuary."

Turning around from Rem's bedside, Subaru met Beatrice's gaze at the door. The girl gave a light snort,

Beatrice: "And what gave you that idea? Our conversation may have been interrupted, but there's still the issue to settle between us."

Subaru: "I know. Then my answer is this— I'll never agree to kill you, and I'll drag you out of this mansion if I have to. That's already decided."

Beatrice: "How arrogant. You would ignore Betty's say in the matter, and just carry out your own intentions— Who do you think you are, to make such ludicrous proclamations, I suppose."

Subaru: "If what you told me is what you truly wanted... then I would have considered it."

Beatrice: "—What's that supposed to mean."

Beatrice's voice was quiet, but an intimidating aura pulsed from her words as she spoke. Subaru felt goosebumps racing up his skin, but he quickly shook his head.

Subaru: “I don’t know the details either. But I just feel like there’s still a lot more to what you’re really thinking inside.”

Beatrice: “—Don’t, I suppose.”

Subaru: “I’m still in the dark about your relationship to the Sanctuary. What does Echidna’s Experimental Grounds have to do with you...? Honestly, I have nothing but bad feelings about this.”

Beatrice: “Will you just stop prying?”

Subaru: “I won’t... Aside from me, who else is going to bother figuring you out? You’ve only ever shut yourself in that room...”

As if her throat had clogged up, Beatrice lost her words.

Seeing this, Subaru lifted Rem from the bed. He would bring her to Arlam Village, and once she’s settled there, he would head to the Sanctuary with Beatrice.

If she could agree to assist him with Door Crossing, that would save them a lot of time, but it was not like he could force her. In that case, it would just be half a day’s journey on Patrasche.

Subaru: “Even if you won’t come to the Sanctuary with me, I’ll ask Roswaal and Ryuzu-san about you. If possible, I’d like to ask the big-shot herself as well.”

As long as Subaru held a genuine yearning in his heart to know, the Witch of Greed would answer his call. This time, he already had far more information than he did before, along with quite a few theories as well. With all the new questions that came with it, he was sure that he’d be accepted into the Dream Citadel.

And when that time comes, he would pry open the secrets of the Sanctuary that everyone had sealed their lips about.

Subaru: “Sooner or later, it’s only a matter of time. Though I can understand why you’d want to delay it as much as you can.”

Beatrice: “Just how long do you plan to continue toying with people, I suppose...!”

Subaru: “Toying? I’ve no such...”

Beatrice: “You callously trample on grounds people don’t wish to be trampled on, and even as you throw them into disarray you spew this selfish drivel. There’s a limit to how much of your farce I will tolerate, I suppose. Two people are dead, and you are just going to leave like nothing happened?”

Subaru: “———I...”

At the end of Beatrice’s rebuke, a look of unbearable pain emerged on Subaru’s face.

Seeing this, Beatrice hesitated for a moment, wondering if she had gone too far. But that doubt was soon replaced by an expression of feigned indifference.

Subaru: “Petra and Frederica... Once I’ve handed Rem to the villagers, I’ll be sure to properly mourn them. And with Petra I... It’s not like I can just stay silent.”

He realized as well that these were only excuses, but, turning away so that Beatrice would not see his face, Subaru started walking.

Beatrice’s words had pierced straight into his heart.

Petra and Frederica’s deaths had only strengthened Subaru’s resolve to reset this world. Even with the defeat of Elsa, that achievement came with far too heavy a price. It would simply be too painful to go on in this world.

Here he was, a person telling Beatrice “Not to die”, and yet, what right did he have to say it? You can’t, but I could—— it was truly selfish to the extreme.

Subaru: “Whether you’ll come to the Sanctuary with me or not, let’s just sort out everything at the mansion first. Then we can pick it up after that.”

Passing Beatrice at the doorway, he continued down the hall. Beatrice looked on silently, but quietly indicated that she would follow him.

Since she was forbidden from taking her own life, Beatrice needed someone else to bring about her end. She couldn’t force his hand, and though he had made his intentions clear, she could only follow close behind him.

What a cruel man he was, to knowingly act this way. The thought of it filled him with guilt.

Subaru: “—Wha?”

While wallowing in this self-loathing, suddenly, Subaru let out a grunt.

The reason was a light impact. As if a hand pushed on his back, Subaru stumbled forward with Rem in his arms.

Turning around after taking a few steps to regain his balance, he saw that it was Beatrice. Was it revenge for what he had said earlier? But just as he was about to furrow his brows and protest—

Beatrice: “—Ah.”

The girl softly cried, with a dull gleam jutting out of her chest.

Subaru: “—Eh?”

The knife that had entered through her back protruded from her chest, slowly carving out a vertical gash— from the top of her ribs down to her waist.

Beatrice’s small body shuddered with the motion of the blade.

And Subaru only watched in stupefaction.

Beatrice: “...This is—”

Softly, Beatrice’s lips murmured something.

She lifted her face to look at the petrified Subaru. Her expression, and the emotions in her eyes, all seemed to be telling of some excessively grand tale,

Beatrice: “Finally...”

Subaru: “Wait...”

Beatrice: “———Ah.”

Even Subaru himself didn't know what he was trying to say.

And before her formless emotions could take shape, Beatrice's voice trailed into a sigh.

With that final sound, Beatrice's body faded into a faintly shining mass, and, in the blink of an eye, scattered as golden particles of light.

Her little frame, curly cream pigtails, charming peevish face, extravagant and cumbersome and well-suited dress, all of everything, fading away—

???: “—Oh my, that's disappointing. It's my first time cutting open a Spirit's bowels, and it's already gone.”

A step behind where Beatrice had vanished, stood a woman holding her murder weapon in hand.

Subaru could already identify her just from the first sound of her voice. From the first moment, he was certain, yet his mind refused to register what should have been impossible. But, within seconds of seeing it with his own eyes, his awareness recovered as he clenched his teeth.

A tooth shattered with a crack. Tasting blood, locking his glare, he screamed.

Subaru: “—ELSAAAA!!”

Elsa: “There's nothing you can do now, is there?”

The pommel of the Kukri knife crashed into the side of his screaming skull.

The blunt impact instantly shattered into his head as the unstoppable force slammed Subaru's body against the wall. The only resistance he could muster was to keep Rem from flying out of his arms.

Profuse blood poured from the shattered gap, his eyes went dark and his limbs would not respond to his will to fight on. Yet, even so, Subaru caught Elsa in his strobing vision, tossing the Kukri knife between her hands.

Subaru: “H... ow... how the fuck are you alive? I checked, I confirmed you were dead...!”

Elsa: “Mmhmm, that’s right. I was dead. If I were burned to ash back then, I probably wouldn’t be here right now.”

Elsa absently answered the shivering Subaru.

Impaled and crucified, Elsa had been certainly dead. She was dead. He was sure of it. But then what was she doing here? Or, was he in some nightmare in which Elsa also had clones like Ryuzu?

But there was blood dripping from Elsa’s limbs, and the hole where her chest was pierced through was only bandaged by a strip of cloth torn from her cloak.

Seeing the dark battle wounds littering her body, there was no doubt that this was the same person as before. The only question was whether she was alive or dead.

Subaru: “You aren’t... immortal, by any chance, are you...?”

Elsa: “Well that’s impossible. I just hang onto life a bit more stubbornly than others. Speaking of which, that girl was really something. I can count on my fingers how many times I’ve taken this much damage to my body.”

Subaru: “...What a coincidence. I can also count on my fingers how many times you’ve tortured me to death.”

Subaru’s remark may have been ironic, but it was certainly not a joke. However, apparently taking it as such, Elsa smiled and did a quick spin on the spot. Then, holding her fingers to her lonely, half-severed braid, Elsa silently looked down at Subaru,

Elsa: “This girl here, I’ve never heard about her.”

Subaru: “...Then how about you pretend you didn’t see her and let it slide?”

Understanding the meaning behind her words, Subaru raised this suggestion to Elsa. Even if there wasn’t much hope of her accepting his advice, it would at least buy him some time for his limbs to start responding to his commands. It was a stupid conversation, but he needed the time.

Elsa: “She definitely wasn’t a part of my plans, so I guess it wouldn’t be a problem... The Spirit girl, the oversized maid... the little maid was kind of a bonus.”

There were three targets. Beatrice, Frederica, and the tacked-on Petra.

Even with his consciousness glowing white-hot, Subaru sharpened his ears so as not to miss a single detail. The fact that Rem wasn't marked as a target must have meant that whoever hired Elsa had forgotten Rem's existence. He had previously thought that Frederica was the employer, but her death sent him back to the drawing board.

Subaru: "Come to think of it, you lied, didn't you?"

Elsa: "Lied?"

Subaru: "About Frederica— Back in the Forbidden Library, you talked like you only killed Petra, but how do you explain that?"

Subaru gestured toward Frederica, lying at the side of the hallway. Following his gaze, with an "Aah", Elsa nodded as if having understood. Then, she turned back to Subaru,

Elsa: "Hers wasn't a very beautiful death."

She made this paltry remark. The murderer's definition of beauty wasn't something he'd want to understand. But after taking someone's life, was this all she had to say? Rage churned inside him, but he knew it wouldn't mean a thing in front of Elsa and the Kukri knife in her hand.

As much as he wanted revenge, his body hadn't recovered nearly enough to strike back. Just like this, strewn on the floor in front of Elsa's murdering blade, the outcome was already decided.

—So, this was as far as he would go.

Acknowledging his impending death, Subaru ran the information he had gathered in this loop through his mind, alongside the new, confounding mysteries. And then, there was his exchange with Beatrice, and the final expression he saw on her face.

Why did the girl who kept telling Subaru "I want to die" and "please kill me" shove him out of the way in the end? Promptly noticing that Elsa was alive, she pushed Subaru away. But just what was it supposed to mean when she did this? Subaru wasn't stupid enough not to realize it.

Elsa: "I don't like that look in your eyes."

Subaru: “Huh? —Gbha!?”

With these words, the flat of her blade struck against his face once again.

His left cheekbone was shattered, and several cracked teeth fell onto the floor. Collapsing, another blow struck him from the opposite side. Intense pain raced through the bottom of his right eye, and, with a flash of her blade, his left ear was sheared off.

The blade and pommel proceed to switch turns in shredding, breaking, tormenting Subaru’s body. She fails to grant the imminent death he had anticipated, gifting him only pain and pain and pain and pain as he squirms, spitting blood and wails.

Elsa: “Struggle on until the last moment of your life. Otherwise, what is the point of living?”

Subaru: “...As if I’d want to take life advice from you.”

A strike. His forehead split open, and he felt the illusion of the contents of his skull spilling as he collapsed. His consciousness grew distant at the solid impact, and Subaru could feel his body steadily being drawn into that frozen world.

So, this is where he dies.

Even if he lost consciousness now, he had no illusions about what falling unconscious in front the Bowel Hunter would entail.

This was the end. This time, this would be as far as he gets. Next time, he won’t fail again. Next time, for sure.

The expression on your face at the very end. I won’t forget it, no matter what.

Subaru: “—Beatrice.”

In her final moments, the girl who had told him “kill me”, had tears within her eyes.

With that sight seared into his mind, Subaru’s consciousness was slowly swallowed, into darkness, into nothing.

Arc 4 Chapter 64 - World Crumbling

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 12, Chapter 4 “The Taste of Death”, Parts 1-2 (heavily changed)

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken – [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#)

The first thing Subaru noticed as his consciousness returned was the unbearable pain throughout his body.

His face, and everything above his neck was wracked with extraordinary pain. His left cheek, the area around his right eye, his molars, his incisors, his left ear— far too many to list, there was not a spot untouched by pain.

He moved his tongue around in his mouth, and found that he had lost two molars as well as one front tooth, and that one of his canines was gone. And when he opened his eyes to survey his surroundings, he noticed that his right eye was so swollen that it could no longer open.

Subaru: “Thh... hies...”

When he tried to speak, his mouth only managed a strange gurgle due to the missing teeth and the blood pooling in his mouth.

Every breath drove a chill into the exposed nerves under his teeth, and though he tried to breathe through his nostrils, dried blood completely clotted the path. Gasping, he spat out the blood in his mouth,

Subaru: “No way... I... didn’t die?”

As he dragged along his overly-damaged body, Subaru recognized the fact that he had survived what should have been certain death.

Looking out through the remaining half of his vision, Subaru found himself lying in the dim corridor. There was no one in sight. He began to recall what happened before passing out, and,

Subaru: “Elsa, ‘s...”

Gone.

Or at least, she is nowhere that Subaru can see her.

She is a woman who operates in the shadows. She may possess a skill to make herself imperceptible to others even when they are looking straight at her— but she would have no reason to use it.

Elsa is gone. She disappeared. Without killing Subaru.

Subaru: “Why... would... no, more importantly...”

Every movement of his mouth made new blood gush out. Annoyedly spitting it out, Subaru shook his head. He tried moving each part of his body to check which areas hurt and which were immobile—

—When he noticed the warm existence, taking faint, rhythmic breaths, resting in his arms.

Subaru: “—Rem.”

The lovely blue-haired girl. The girl who was instilling him with strength even as she went on sleeping.

In his arms, Rem’s heart was silently beating. Her shallow, repeated breathing, her steady, undeniable pulse, and her faintly blushing skin— the rhythms of life remain present in her.

Subaru: “———”

Overwhelmed with emotion, he tightened his arms around her.

Taking advantage of her lack of reaction, he held her delicate body as he relished in its warmth, as if to perceive through her skin the proof that she still lives.

Subaru: “Why... did she leave... without killing me or Rem...?”

Holding Rem’s body, Subaru remarked on Elsa’s inexplicable departure.

She killed Petra, she killed Frederica, and even Beatrice was extinguished by her hands. And yet, the murderer left without taking Subaru and Rem’s lives when they were ripe for the taking in front of her.

Indeed, before losing consciousness, Subaru had pleaded for Rem's life, and Elsa's reply could be interpreted as an acceptance of his request. But would she really stay true to her word?

He doubted he would ever be able to understand the mind of a psychopath like the Bowel Hunter, but her reason for sparing Rem might have been just that simple.

Subaru: "But then... why did she let me live...?"

He would be killed for sure, that was what he had thought. At least, Elsa had swung her blade at Subaru while brandishing clear malevolence towards Subaru. The pain of every shattered bone and every carved-up muscle told him that was the case.

But that only laid more suspicion onto the central question, why on earth had Elsa allowed Subaru to live?

Subaru: "Either way... right now..."

Unable to understand, Subaru shook his head, and strained his aching body to lift Rem onto his arms.

Holding Rem lightly in his arms, Subaru looked towards the end of the hallway— and, spotting Frederica's corpse, lying there as if abandoned, he decided on what he would have to do.

—Before anything else, he would bury Frederica and Petra.

Subaru: "Even though there's really no point when this world is bound to end..."

A sentimental, irrational, and wretched act, he muttered in self-derision.

Subaru had already decided that he would reset this world with his death.

Too much had been lost. And in spite of what he gained, he had failed to protect even a single thing he had sought to protect. Subaru lost everything, just like all those times before, or perhaps even more. Subaru no longer held the courage to live on in a world where so much was already lost.

If his death could bring them back, then he wouldn't hesitate for a second.

This world was a world that was ending.

Whether it was Petra's, Frederica's, or Beatrice's death, all of it could be reset.

His promise to Petra, his apology to Frederica, and his definite answer to Beatrice's sorrows, they could all be fulfilled in the next world.

Should he rationalize matters like that, then mourning their deaths truly carried no meaning. Because if Subaru alone could endure, then the sentimentality left to a disappearing world would not be anything to remain in anyone's memory.

—But, if he truly had that kind of resolve, Natsuki Subaru would have already moved on to the next try by now.

Subaru: "Resolve, determination, ability... I'm always lacking in everything. Why am I always so weak... Huh, Rem?"

The girl in his arms did not answer him.

But, whether it was lamenting his own powerlessness, or laying bare his weakness, right now, the only place where Subaru could do this was in front of this sleeping girl.

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—It had been only about fifteen minutes after deciding to lay Petra and Frederica to rest when he saw it.

Subaru: "What... the hell?"

Seeing the object sitting in front of him, Subaru let out this stupid groan in his throat.

But who could blame him? Because that was just how strange and incomprehensible the object before him was.

A pink-toned wad of meat— would perhaps be a close description.

Its shape was kind of like a lopsided ball of mud a child might have made, but out of meat. That explanation alone likely conveyed its oddity, but there was more reason than that for Subaru's bewilderment.

Subaru: "It's big—"

Simply put, the hunk of meat was enormous.

It was big enough for him to have to gaze upwards, and he could sense the weight of its dense mass just by looking. Both its color and texture reminded him of fresh pork or poultry one might find in a meat aisle. That said, Subaru lacked the courage to touch it and verify.

As far as Subaru could see, the meat wads numbered to about a dozen. Every single one was the exact same size and conspicuously littered about the area.

Subaru: "What... the hell is...?"

Confused and without answers, Subaru repeated that same question over and over. Then, as he looked around,

Subaru: "Where did all the villagers go?"

Standing in the deserted center of Arlam Village, surrounded by hunks of meat, Subaru stupidly muttered to himself.

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—Subaru's venture to Arlam Village was undertaken first to find helpers in preforming funeral rites for Petra and Frederica, but, most importantly, to inform Petra's family of her death.

He was prepared to be beaten, and to be sworn at.

It was the same sentimentality he had in the mansion. Subaru could avoid this pain. He could hide the truth of Petra's death, and reset this world without the villagers ever knowing.

If he hid his responsibility for Petra's death deep inside his heart, with only his guilt to haunt him, that would probably have been a grace. But, as for whether he could forgive himself for doing so, that would surely be impossible.

Subaru: "In the end, it's just self-satisfaction, isn't it?"

So he decided to inform Petra's family before burying the two.

Subaru did not know what he should do to preform funerary rites for Beatrice. Spirits don't leave bodies behind. The clean, spotless manner of her disappearance had made her death seem almost unreal to Subaru.

"Who knows, maybe", he couldn't help but cling to such hopeful thoughts. With those ambivalent feelings on his mind, Subaru made his way towards Arlam Village.

He brought Rem with him, intending to ask someone to take care of her while he saw to the burials. And then, when he arrived, while searching around for the villagers, he instead found those lumps of meat.

Subaru: "—There's... no one here."

Temporarily setting Rem down under the roof of one of the houses, and walking a full circle around the village, that was the conclusion Subaru had come to.

The congealed blood on his sweaty brow moistens, painting his face in red, his state atrocious. Should the villagers witness Subaru now, the proper reaction would be to greet him with a horrified shriek. But not finding anybody who will shriek at his appearance, Subaru returns to sit beside the sleeping Rem, utterly lost.

—When he saw that Elsa had disappeared from the mansion, it wasn't that he hadn't considered it.

Elsa didn't bat an eye when she murdered everyone involved in the Capital. So, perhaps unsatisfied with the people in the mansion, she had decided to put the whole village to the blade.

Subaru had pondered over various explanations on his way to Arlam Village, and that possibility was just a part of his unease. But what greeted him when he arrived was far beyond anything he could have imagined.

Instead of villagers, there were just scattered hunks of meat.

—Naturally, deep down, Subaru had imagined the worst, but he was just subconsciously ignoring it.

Subaru: “No one’s here... then there’s no point dawdling here... better hurry and... bury them.”

Muttering this excuse, Subaru lifted Rem into his arms and left the village.

The enormous, motionless masses of meat remained as they were. Subaru didn’t feel the slightest pang on his conscience, leaving them there. He would have preferred if they didn’t even linger in the deepest recesses of his memories.

It felt like his head was going to explode.

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Burying Petra and Frederica turned out to be an unexpectedly simple affair.

Preparing their appearance for interment, he had wiped clean their bloodstained skin with a cloth. As for clothes, he had changed them into a new set with his apologies. Naturally, there were no inappropriate feelings involved.

As he passed the girls’ cold, stiffened arms through the sleeves of their clothes, he wanted to cry, but the back of his eyes only grew dry, trapping his heart within that inexplicable emotion.

Subaru: “...At least, have peace.”

Subaru quietly said a prayer for their repose, as he laid the earth over them.

It goes without saying that Subaru knew nothing about the prayers of this world, neither does he know the methods for seeing off the dead in the old world, for that matter. All his relative were still alive and in good health, so he never had to attend any funerals, and he never took any particular interest in the secular ceremonies of the Japanese people.

He regretted that now.

—The fact that he didn't even know the proper words to lay them to rest was filling him with remorse.

Subaru: "And I caused you problems, too. Thank you, for helping me."

Saying this, Subaru reached out his hand, and the black ground dragon brought her snout over to his fingers.

With her legs dirtied by the dug-up soil, Patrasche nudged closer to Subaru as if concerned for him.

After finding Patrasche safe in the stables, Subaru asked her for her help with Petra and Frederica's burials. The clever dragon quickly understood Subaru's clumsy request, and, alongside Subaru, who was using a tool resembling a spade, she dug the hole for Frederica's tall body.

Even with her mighty legs that could outrace the wind completely coated in mud, it did not diminish the jet-black ground dragon's nobility and beauty. And Subaru was once again reminded of his immense gratitude for her existence.

Petra's grave was dug by Subaru. Though her body was small, he didn't want her to feel cramped, and so he wound up tearing the skins of his palm several times over on the handle of the unfamiliar tool.

Laying the earth over her, and watching Petra's figure receding from view, at last, the stifled tears poured out, and Subaru did not bother to wipe them. He gave Frederica a similar send-off, and after placing a simple marker over their graves, the funeral had drawn to an end.

Having concluded one of his tasks, where he should have felt a burden taken off his shoulders, the weight only grew heavier.

Subaru: "...There's no point staying here anymore."

He softly murmured. The curtain had fallen over the irrevocable tragedy at the mansion.

Carving each and every last one of those unforgettable events into his memories, he made sure he'd never forget his present regret as he bid the two farewell.

This remorse engraved into his very soul, which he will be sure to wipe away in the next attempt. Only once he had accomplished this, could he truly take responsibility for their deaths.

Subaru: “After we’ve checked what we need to check, let’s return to the Sanctuary— We can’t leave Rem here, so she’s coming too.”

The sun had begun to wane.

In the steadily darkening world, Subaru realized that it must be approaching the third night. Once he had verified what he should, if he set out from the mansion the next morning, he would be back in the Sanctuary before the fourth night.

That would leave a day and a half until the fated sixth day. And this would also be the first time Subaru had traveled back to the Sanctuary from the mansion.

Defend the mansion, and break through the Sanctuary.

Because there were two inevitable hurdles, he would need to head back for the necessary experience points before he could take on the final loop.

What would have changed at the Sanctuary while Subaru was gone?

Things would have probably proceeded along the same lines as the time Garfiel knocked Subaru out and imprisoned him. In that case, Otto and Ram might just take action to free the Arlam refugees on the fifth night.

Subaru: “Must be before that happens... Huh.”

The way he left Garfiel was another cause for concern.

Subaru had utilized a forceful method to block his pursuit by using Ryuzu as a shield. His imagination surely couldn’t conceive just how much he had infuriated him.

On top of that, he would have to tell Garfiel about his older sister’s death. How he suspected her of being a spy, and how he had failed to do anything to save her.

He would likely have to resign himself to Garfiel’s rage, and take any hit that may come from that.

Subaru: “Back to the Sanctuary, then— I miss Emilia.”

Thinking over all the countless incidents beleaguering his mind, Subaru absently let slip this honest thought. Or perhaps, it was closer to a whimper.

But, in this very moment, it was what he truly wanted.

He wanted to see Emilia's face. And to touch her. He wanted to feel the reality of Emilia's existence, and to heal his heart that was on the verge of breaking.

Those thoughts were just a testament to the extent of Subaru's exhaustion.

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—It was when they entered the forest surrounding the Sanctuary, that Subaru noticed that something was strange.

Riding on Patrasche, he was holding the sleeping Rem against his chest. It was a horrendously unbalanced and precarious arrangement, but thankfully, Rem did not move about, and Patrasche was able to perfectly make up for her master's incompetence as they sped along the road.

Naturally, they couldn't go at full speed as they did on the way to the mansion, and it took them seventeen hours to retrace the same path. And now, it was already approaching the fourth night. He had planned to spend a day and a half in the Sanctuary, but it looked like it would have to be shrunk down to one day.

It was a necessary use of time. And of course, he had no intention of blaming Patrasche. But if there was one thing Subaru had failed to take into account,

Subaru: "Seriously, this can't be a joke... What the fuck's happening here...!?"

Halfway along the road to the Sanctuary, through the forest where the barrier stood— a stinging chill starts to encase the world.

The trees' green leaves were coated with frost, and their trunks frozen in thin sheets of white. The puddles along the ground had frozen over, and there were wintry patches every way he looked.

The temperature was abnormally cold— even more frigid than that of a harsh winter. Subaru tightened his arms around Rem as he looked about, expelling breaths of white mist.

As usual, the woods are relatively devoid of critters, but now, even the life force of the trees had weakened. The fact that the forest was so unprepared for this sheer cold provided undeniable proof that this cold was absolutely not a natural phenomenon.

Subaru: “Everything ahead is frozen and white... I got a bad feeling about this, Patrasche.”

Patrasche: “———”

Subaru: “Hey... Patrasche?”

Irritated by the ominous feeling in his chest, he wanted to tell Patrasche to speed up— but Patrasche did not respond. Furrowing his brows as he looked down at his favorite dragon, he saw that her legs were stopping, and her breaths were pained and ragged.

Subaru: “Patrasche!?”

Subaru hurriedly pulled on the reins to stop her. He hopped down from the saddle, and reached out his hand to her neck. The rocky texture of the scales of her neck felt the same as usual, except it was terrifyingly cold. And, it was then that he realized it.

Subaru: “Unless, are ground dragons vulnerable to the cold...? They look just like reptiles, I wonder how they deal with winter?”

Most reptiles like lizards and snakes hibernate during the winter. Since they look so similar visually, perhaps some of the reptilian qualities applied to ground dragons as well.

In that case, having Patrasche march towards the cold would be nothing less than suicide. If what Subaru imagined was correct, then the closer they get to the center of the Sanctuary, the more severe the cold would become.

Subaru: “It’s too harsh for you to come with me... I guess. From the looks of it, the ground dragons that stayed in the Sanctuary might be in danger as well.”

Subaru stroked Patrasche's shivering body with his hand. Perhaps it was doing nothing more than to console her, but Patrasche leaned her body into his palm as if to wrap herself around the sensation.

Without her, it would no doubt take even longer to reach the Sanctuary— but if she went along with him, she might very well die on the way there.

Subaru: "Patrasche... I'm sorry, but I'll have to leave you outside the forest... or actually, could you go back to the mansion?"

Hearing Subaru's decision, Patrasche let out a sad snort.

But she was clever enough to understand Subaru's concerns, as well as her own physical condition and the state of the forest ahead. After a few more consoling words from Subaru, she lowered her head and did not disobey him.

After rubbing her head to his heart's content, Subaru took out some basic rations and clothing from Patrasche's travel pack and put on as much as he could to ward off the cold. He did the same for Rem, and after securing the baggage with her body, he lifted her up.

Subaru: "The way to the Sanctuary is... straight ahead... right?"

Patrasche: "———"

Subaru: "Don't give me that worried look... I'm more worried about you, you know. It must've been painful, and I'm sorry for not noticing sooner. It was inconsiderate of me, sorry."

Subaru drooped down his head, and Patrasche let out a small neigh as if to say, "There's no need to apologize". Then, she set out her steps towards the forest's edge, while Subaru watched her until she was out of sight.

Patrasche didn't look back even once as she left. Perhaps, it was because she possessed a dignity which did not regard displaying rue highly, and, simultaneously, a kindness that prevented Subaru from feeling responsibility.

Through and through, Subaru acknowledged everything his beloved dragon had done for him.

Subaru: “Patrasche should have no problem finding her way out of the forest... She was worrying about me infinitely more than herself... Shit.”

Shifting Rem in his arms, Subaru walked onward with the sound of frost crunching under his feet.

His exhaled breaths turned white, and his teeth would clatter if he allowed himself to feel the cold. Forward, forward, he headed towards the Sanctuary.

Subaru: “What on earth happened... Emilia...?”

He called to the name of the girl who must be at the heart of this freezing cold.

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Forcing his frozen legs forward, breathing in shallow huffs through lips that had already forgotten how to shiver. Doing his best to keep his sticking eyelids open, Subaru managed to maintain his hazy-white vision as he advanced through the forest.

—The extreme cold enveloping the Sanctuary far exceeded Subaru’s naive expectations. With every step that brought him closer, he could feel his body temperature dropping.

He had long lost the sensation of his skin, and the only thing driving his body was the sense of duty to those who have departed, and the will to move forward,

Subaru: “———”

In his arms, Rem went emitting her steady signs of life, giving no indication of whether the outside environment was affecting her.

Forging straight ahead, he advanced towards the Sanctuary. Supposedly.

He cannot tell by sight whether he was on the right direction or not. But he could only trust that he was getting closer by the intensifying glacial cool as he walked.

The snow had already piled up to his shins, and before he knew it, the forest had completely transformed into a landscape of winter.

It was a power capable of transforming the very nature of the world— and Subaru knew what it might be.

Subaru: “———”

Quivering, he pried open his frozen lips while blood seeped from the ripped-off tissue as he gasped for air. He touched the warmth of his blood with the tip of his tongue and was assured that his body hadn't frozen through.

He could keep going. He could still do it.

He hadn't learned anything yet. If he stopped here, he wouldn't be able to tell himself what all those sacrifices had been for. And so,

Subaru: “—Ah.”

Suddenly, noticing something cut across his stark-white vision, Subaru halted his steps.

Rubbing his nearly closed eyes open, Subaru strained his gaze to see the anomaly that had cut into his sight. Gradually making out its contours, he saw that it was a person— A person he knew.

Subaru: “Ryuzu... san?”

Ryuzu: “———”

At Subaru's call, the girl only responded with a silent gaze. Observing this reaction, Subaru immediately recognized that this girl wasn't Ryuzu, but a replica of Ryuzu Meyer.

And that, if she was a replica, then he should have the rights to command her.

Subaru: “It's good... you're here... Please... guide me to the Sanctuary...”

???: “She ain't gonna listen t'yer requests, y'know?”

Huffing with white, faltering breaths, Subaru called out to the replicant girl, but another voice cut in between them.

He looked up, and immediately saw someone landing in the snow beside the girl. Watching the figure sink into the snow with a crunch, Subaru saw that it was a single youth.

With short, blonde hair, and a sharpened gaze, his entire body emanated murderous hostility.

Subaru: "Garfiel."

Garfiel: "Yo, y'still got the guts t'come back? Gotta say, I'm impressed. Well, they do say «The bow o'a lyin' betoon is splendid»."

Without forgetting to throw in an incomprehensible reference, Garfiel clicked his fangs at Subaru.

But as he disdainfully looked down at the panting Subaru, Garfiel's eyes suddenly widened in surprise when he saw Rem in Subaru's arms.

Garfiel: "Huh...? What's Ram doin' wi... wait, that ain't Ram. Hah? Th'hell's goin' on? Who's that girl..."

Subaru: "I'll explain, but whether you'll understand is a bit sketchy... This is Rem. Ram's totally authentic younger sister."

Garfiel: "I ain't never heard 'bout Ram havin' a sister... but can't really decide if yer lyin' outright either, oy."

Facing someone who looked exactly like the girl he had a crush on, Garfiel's aggression somewhat diminished. Seeing how Garfiel didn't kill him on sight, Subaru determined that he was still rational, and decided to put off making escape plans for now.

Then, Subaru turned to the Ryuzu replicant quietly standing at Garfiel's side,

Subaru: "You said that girl won't listen to me anymore... What do you mean?"

Garfiel: "...Ain't that pretty simple? Soon as ya left th'Sanctuary, I went to th'Experimental Grounds and overwrote the command right and got it back. Remembered some unpleasant times cuz' of you."

Subaru: “The command right transfers that easily?”

Garfiel: “Y’basically just have’ta touch it. That’s how you got it, ain’t it?”

“It” would be the crystal sealing the original Ryuzu Meyer inside. If touching it was how Subaru received the command right in the first place, then it was only natural that Garfiel took it back the same way. In any case,

Subaru: “It was really considerate of you to come all the way here to welcome me.”

Garfiel: “I didn’t come here t’entertain yer bullshit. Just take a look at what’s happenin’ and it ain’t hard t’see we’re way past th’time for pleasant conversations, yeah?”

Subaru: “Yeah, you’re right... I’ll just come right out and ask, then.”

Subaru nodded at Garfiel’s retort, then inhaled with a slight shake of his head, and said,

Subaru: “—Emilia’s the one doing this... isn’t she?”

Garfiel: “Got no fuckin’ idea. Either way, she ain’t coming out of the Tomb.”

Subaru: “She hasn’t come out of the Tomb?”

Subaru furrowed his brows at the unexpected reply. Seeing this, Garfiel clicked his tongue and kicked up a great chunk of snow with his foot,

Garfiel: “Th’half-devil’s been actin’ weird since th’d day y’left. I thought she’s calmed down, but then she shut herself’side the Tomb. B’fore y’know it, th’whole Sanctuary’s covered in ice— Just like Elior Forest.”

Subaru: “You know about Emilia’s...!?”

Garfiel: “Y’tthink I haven’t heard? Roswaal’s a fuckin’ bastard, but he still answers questions when needed. That’s why I ain’t trustin’ Emilia-sama one bit.”

Listening to Garfiel spit this out, Subaru’s expression darkened. Yet, before he could react, Garfiel had already closed their distance and was now standing right before his eyes.

Garfiel: “That expression’s fuckin’ pathetic.”

Subaru: “Wh—!?”

A palm shoved against Subaru’s chest, and he gracelessly fell backwards. He hurriedly tried to shield Rem with his arms, but his hands clutched at nothing. As for why that was,

Subaru: “What’re y... Rem—!”

Garfiel: “What, y’want her back? Oyoy, yer one greedy bastard. And here I thought Emilia-sama was th’girl of yer dreams.”

Having struck Subaru where it hurt, Garfiel snorted through his nose.

There, in Garfiel’s arms, was Rem’s body which he had snatched out of Subaru’s grasp. Frantically forcing his insensate body into motion, Subaru tried to grab onto Garfiel, but Garfiel leapt out of reach.

Subaru: “What’re you going to do to Rem...!”

Garfiel: “Ain’t like I’m gonna have anythin’ bad happen t’her. That’d be what yer’d call bein’ unreasonable. I’m a reasonable guy, y’know. Things that ain’t got any proper sense to ‘em make me sick.”

As he said this, Garfiel’s gaze as he looked down at Rem indeed did not carry any hostility. At very least, Garfiel’s character is not so twisted as to injure a girl whose face is identical to his sweetheart’s.

“Then why”, Subaru almost wanted to ask, but Garfiel beat him to it.

Garfiel: “You get in the tomb— And then, you pull the half-devil out.”

Arc 4 Chapter 65 - Passion in the Snow

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 12, Chapter 4 “The Taste of Death”, Part 3

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

Forcibly dragged all the way to the Tomb, he was dumped in front of the entrance.

Be it snow or frost, Subaru spat out the sorbet-like substance that had gathered in his mouth. Mistaking the pain of his exposed skin for numbness, he looks back behind him.

Subaru: “That’s some... pretty rough treatment.”

Garfiel: “My head ain’t smart enough to be so considerate. Be glad I’m just bein’ rough with ya. ‘Less y’want me t’be rough with yer girl too?”

Puffing white breaths and looking down at Subaru on the ground, Garfiel gestured to Rem, who was still in his arms.

A hostage. Subaru wasn’t sure if that was what Garfiel intended, but it was certainly the perfect threat to coerce Subaru with.

Subaru: “Don’t you... do anything weird to Rem.”

Garfiel: “Long as ya do what I ask’d, I won’t.”

Subaru uttered quietly as he pushed himself off the thinly snow-veiled ground. Standing at his side was the Ryuzu replicant who helped carry him here, staring blankly at him. As usual, she was in her shabby robe, which seemed to be far too scant for the cold.

Subaru: “Can’t we give the girls some more clothes...? She looks so cold, I can’t bear looking at her.”

Garfiel: “Y’realize what they are, right? They can’t feel th’cold in th’first place. If yer tryin’ to buy time, I ain’t got no reason t’play along.”

Subaru: “Aw, don’t keep pointing it out. Even I know buying time won’t improve the situation in any way.”

His vision blinded by the snowstorm, Subaru followed Garfiel’s advice and turned towards the Tomb.

Amidst the world of white, he could faintly make out the ruin of stone. Even in this raging phenomenon of nature, Echidna’s tomb stood calmly, eerily waiting for its next challenger.

And Emilia would be inside.

Subaru: “How long has Emilia been in there?”

Garfiel: “She went in th’night before last, it’s been two days now. Honestly, I couldn’t care less as long as she ain’t dead.”

Subaru: “From your position, I can see how that’s the case... So you didn’t try to go in and bring her out yourself?”

Garfiel: “I can’t go in th’Tomb. Part of the Contract.”¹³²

That intriguing reply pretty much summed up the whole of Garfiel’s position. Subaru wasn’t sure just to what extent the Sanctuary’s residents knew about this, but Garfiel had definitely been inside the Tomb. He met Echidna and was granted the influence of an Apostle of Greed, as well as the qualification to hold the command rights over the Ryuzu clones.

But why he would keep it a secret and postpone the liberation of the Sanctuary was beyond Subaru.

Subaru: “Once I go inside and ask Echidna herself... guess I’ll find out.”

Garfiel: “Quit mumblin’. I told ya to get in there. Drag that half-devil out and get her to stop makin’ all this snow. Otherwise I’ll be forced to do somethin’ I don’t wanna do.”

¹³² Note by SummaryAnon: “Double meaning. The Japanese can simultaneously mean «I’ve made an agreement not to».”

Garfiel slightly lifted Rem in his arms and let out a menacing smile. That smile didn't suit him at all, but Subaru knew Garfiel as a person who carries out his threats. Regardless of what his true intentions were, as long as it serves to protect the Sanctuary, he would easily turn his claws on a girl with the same face as the one he loved.

Subaru: "Don't do anything to Rem— That's my condition."

Garfiel: "...Just go."

Blown by the frigid wind, Subaru left these words with the coldest voice he could muster, and began walking towards the Tomb. Behind him, Garfiel watched him as he went.

His true motives were still unknown, but Subaru remembered that there was something he had forgotten to tell him.

He had forgotten to tell Garfiel about his sister Frederica's death.

The only explanation he could think of was that the cold and rage had gotten to his head.

Right now, was he still sane? If he was sane, then how?

He let Petra die, he doubted Frederica's innocence, and he returned to the Sanctuary to find this. His relationship with Garfiel was at its worst, and he had no idea whether the others in the Sanctuary were safe.

Continuing on in these atrocious circumstances, how could he be sane?

He mustn't stop thinking. He mustn't give in. He must look forward, look upward, grasp for a future worth grasping, and take on every burden he must bear.

Otherwise, what would Subaru—

Subaru: "——"

The claps of his faltering steps struck upon the Tomb's dry floor.

Unlike the outside, in here, he could barely feel the reach of the raging cold. It was as though the cold had been barred from entering this place, but that would only be an illusion, and the reality was that it was merely diminished.

As Subaru stepped into the Tomb, the mechanism for welcoming those who were qualified activated, and the dim lamps of the dark corridor came alight.

The murky lights lining the walls invited Subaru into the depths, and, with the sensation of all the blood in his body freezing, Subaru drove his limbs to venture inside.

And, at the end of what felt like a long, long passage, he arrived at a room.

The room where the First Trial took place, where they faced their past. Arriving here at last,

Emilia: “—Subaru?”

Like the ring of a silver chime, Subaru was welcomed by that tender, long-awaited voice.

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Subaru heard his name in the darkness and saw a figure directly in front of him.

Just as his eyes began to adjust to the darkness of the ruins, her long, silver hair and her alluring, amethyst eyes flooded into his sight, and Subaru couldn't help but call out her name.

Subaru: “Emilia.”

Emilia: “Yes. Yeah, Subaru... It's me.”

Pronouncing those four short syllables and hearing her reply, Subaru felt his body on the verge of collapsing.

It might seem like an overreaction, but that was simply the weight of his overflowing emotions.

Fatigue, exhaustion, and the sense of loss.

All these sensations tormented Subaru, and yet, it was only when he stood in front of Emilia that his knees gave way to the emotions that he had forbidden himself to notice.

His body tilted forward, about to fall, but two arms reached out and caught him. Their touch was soft and warm. He looked up, and saw her fair, beautiful face looking back at him. For a moment, he held his breath, and forgot where he was.

Right now, he was only resting in Emilia's tender embrace.

Subaru: "Ah, s—sorry... I felt weak all of a sudden..."

Emilia: "It's alright. I'm not suspecting you of doing it on purpose or anything. But even if it was on purpose, I still would've caught you."

Cutting off Subaru's excuse, Emilia closed off his escape.

Rather than chiding him, she gently consoled him. For this, Subaru breathed a deep sigh of relief— But it was only then that he noticed something strange about Emilia.

Emilia looked the same as usual. Gentle, calm, a little aloof, full of compassion, and cute with a somewhat childish charm— none of it had changed.

She was the same, usual Emilia from the peaceful days they spent in Roswaal's mansion.

This was not the ordinary for an Emilia who had failed to conquer the Trials and been cornered by her feelings of duty.

Subaru: "E—Emilia... while I was gone, uh..."

—Did something happen to change your mind?

Subaru carefully chose his words, intending to ask that question.

But before the words could escape his lips, she softly murmured,

Emilia: "—Lonely."

Subaru: "...Huh?"

Failing to catch Emilia's whisper, Subaru furrowed his brows and asked her to repeat it.

He could see her beautiful, silver visage just by turning up his face. Staring into her eyes from a distance close enough to feel her breath, this time, Subaru would not miss a single word.

Meeting his gaze, Emilia continued,

Emilia: "I was so lonely, Subaru— When you left me."

Subaru: "Ah... No, it's... not like that. I was never going to abandon you..."

Emilia: "———"

Subaru: "I'm sure I said this in the letter too, but... there was something I had to do. So I couldn't be with you for a while. I am so sorry for making you feel lonely, Emilia. I made you feel like that, but I that thing I had to do, I wasn't even able to do properly, and..."

Emilia: "Pff... Huhu."

Resting under Emilia's gaze, Subaru frantically tried to explain himself. But before he could finish, as if she couldn't hold it in any longer, Emilia burst out laughing.

When he saw this, Subaru couldn't help but doubt his eyes. They were in the middle of a conversation, and in such dire circumstances, why did Emilia burst out laughing?

What was so funny? Besides, Emilia was never the kind of girl to do this.

Emilia: "Even if you don't try sooooo hard to explain, I won't get mad at you. Geez Subaru, even your face is turning pale... Pffffhuhu."

Subaru: "E—Emilia...?"

Emilia: "It's alright, Subaru. You left a letter for me. After thinking really really reeaally hard, you wrote it for me. I felt so lonely, and I thought I was going to cry, but... I just read that letter over and over again."

Weaving those adorable words with her lips, Emilia's smile deepened.

In that enchanting, lovable smile is a sweet whisper near clutching Subaru's heart. Learning that Emilia had valued his letter, and had even used it as a mental support, could almost make Subaru's heart soar with fiery passion.

But, keeping his consciousness from being swept away by tides of passion was the sickening foreboding in his chest.

Something was wrong. Something was strange. The sense of awryness that he had felt from the start had never left him.

What is it? Something wasn't right. Even when Emilia was so adorable in this instant.

Even though Emilia was answering him so sweetly.

Subaru: "Emilia... how did the Trial go?"

Emilia: "The Trial..."

Subaru: "Yeah, the Trial. That's why you came in here, right? I'm sorry you had to endure it alone. I want to apologize, but I also want to know what happened. Even if you failed, I won't care, but the fact that you're like this tells me..."

Emilia: "Failed. I failed, you know? I couldn't overcome the First Trial, my past. And all this when you were expecting from me, and worried about me, I'm sorry."

Subaru: "Ah..."

Subaru regretted allowing that groan to escape his throat. To Emilia, that voice must have sounded like disappointment just now. In that case, it'd be no different than an immediate betrayal of his words, right after he assured her "I won't mind".

The thought overwhelmed him with remorse, when suddenly, he felt a soft, smooth touch against his head.

Emilia slid her fingers through Subaru's short black hair, and gently stroked his head with her palm.

Unable to understand the meaning of her gesture, Subaru blinked as if in a daze. Emilia smiled as she saw his surprised expression, and a touch of red flushed onto her cheeks.

Emilia: “Subaru, you always want to touch my hair, right? So, I want to occasionally do it to you, too. Hehe, Subaru’s so vulnerable right now...”

Subaru: “Em... ilia...?”

Emilia: “If you really abandoned me, and left just like that, whatever would I do... over, and over, and over, that thought’s been circling in my mind. I was really, really afraid. And so, when I saw you come back to me, I was really happy.”

Although she had just told him that she failed her Trials, right now, the only thing reflected within Emilia’s eyes was Subaru. Her eyes were feverish, and wet, and fixed upon Subaru.

How Subaru had longed for the day when she would gaze at him this way. And how he had yearned for her to call his name so warmly, and to look at him with such passionate, teary eyes.

Everything he had done up till now had been for a taste of the passion of this instant.

And that was why---

Emilia: “Subaru. Will you always stay with me? Always be with me? Because, as long as you are with me, I won’t need anything else---”

Subaru never imagined that when the day came for Emilia to sing him these words of blind affection, it would frighten him so.

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Holding Subaru in her arms, Emilia went on with her loving whispers.

Emilia: “At first, when I heard that Subaru was gone, I felt really hurt. I was so scared. I wondered if it was because I couldn’t do anything right... and Subaru had grown tired of me. Whenever I thought that, I’d be so terrified, I couldn’t stop my body from shaking...”

Subaru: “———”

Emilia: “But then, I found your letter, and I knew it was Subaru’s words, and the fear went away. Subaru is so amazing. Even though just a moment before I was still afraid, you blew away that feeling in an instant... Yeah, you’ve always helped me like this, Subaru.”

Subaru: “———”

Emilia: “The contents of your letter made me really happy. You wrote a lot of things so that I wouldn’t worry. And it took me a reaaaaaally long time to read them. You took the time to write it for me, and all that time you were thinking about me, it made me so glad.”

Subaru: “———”

Emilia: “In the letter, you told me you loved me a whole lot. When you said it in the dragon carriage, I was reeaally happy, so much so that I wanted to cry... And when I read it in the letter, I felt like I was really going to cry too. And then, I was thinking, I’ve received something so immense and precious... And I’ve only just realized it.”

Subaru: “———”

Emilia: “So when I saw Subaru come back, I couldn’t help myself anymore. The little me in the deepest part of my heart was crying Subaru’s name. Then, I wanted to reach out, to touch you, and I couldn’t stop myself...”

Subaru: “———”

Emilia: “Say, Subaru. Sorry for everything up to now. I’ve done a lot of cruel things to you. Even when I knew what you felt about me, I made you hold it all down. That was reeaally cruel of me, I kind of realize that now.”

Subaru: “———”

Emilia: “It must have hurt, to hold all those feelings inside. I must have been so selfish when you were trying so hard. Even though I wanted to think about you... to understand you, I couldn’t understand at all.”

Subaru: “———”

Emilia: “But it’s different now. I’ve always been thinking about Subaru. You’re all I seem to think about. Just like how you... Um, told me that you love me, and that you’re always thinking about me... Now, maybe I... feel the same way about you too.”

Subaru: “———”

Emilia: “I’m sorry. That was unfair just now. Even when you were scared and didn’t know what I thought, you still said it to me.”

Subaru: “———”

Emilia: “So, I’ll... say it properly too— I want to tell you that...”

Subaru: “———”

Emilia: “You know, Subaru. I... love you. I really, really love you. I keep thinking about you, I’m always thinking about you, and about how I always want to be with you.”

Subaru: “———”

Emilia: “Subaru, if you feel the same way about me... I’ll be really happy... you know.”

Subaru: “———”

Emilia: “Ehehe. Mm, mm... love you. Subaru... I really, really love you.”



Illustration from Volume 12, coloring by DdukaE ([source](#))

Arc 4 Chapter 66 - Crimson Snowscape

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 12, Chapter 4 “The Taste of Death”, Parts 4-5

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

—Seeing Subaru come out of the Tomb alone, Garfiel’s hostility spiked as if stabbing into his skin.

The cold was of a different level outside the Tomb.

Contrary to the somewhat insulated warmth inside, the extreme cold of the Sanctuary sucked all the stamina and warmth out of one’s body in a matter of seconds.

An endless blizzard, and a blinding curtain of white. His exhaled breaths froze as they left his mouth, and the shivers driving into his core were almost unbearable.

Hugging his own shoulders, Subaru shuddered in front of Garfiel’s glare. And, clicking his exposed fangs, Garfiel’s attention turned to the empty corridor behind Subaru,

Garfiel: “Doesn’t look like anyone’s behind ya, oy.”

Subaru: “Yeah, she’s not coming. Emilia is inside, sleeping right now.”

Garfiel: “Sleepin’? Huh?”

Subaru: “She’s exhausted. For two days straight, she’s just been waking up to the Trials, over and over. It’s worn her down, both body and soul. And she hasn’t been eating. It’s just like her... to force herself like this.”

Again and again, forcing herself to challenge the Trials only to fail regardless, Subaru could imagine Emilia’s frustration and disappointment.

Surely, it would be the same the sense of powerlessness that Subaru himself had felt on so many occasions.

Subaru: “———”

Deep inside the Tomb, in her reprieve from the Trials, Emilia was blissfully sleeping.

The memory of Emilia’s body heat and of the warmth of their long embrace as she whispered her blind love into his ear at once sent Subaru’s blood boiling with love and longing, and left him stricken with such regret that he wanted to die.

He remembered Emilia’s flushed cheeks, her voice trembling with passion as she said all the words he had wanted to hear, and the entirety of her emotion tempting him to drown inside it.

Had a part of him considered just letting himself drown and sink into that tender depravity alongside Emilia? No one could possibly know.

After rejecting Emilia’s temptations that would have brought even Gods to their knees, Subaru walked out of the Tomb. Leaving Emilia as she slept, he had no intention of telling her about what was happening outside. And he was not about to bring her within reach of Garfiel’s malice.

But, in contrast to Subaru’s quiet determination, Garfiel’s rage showed no signs of dissipating. He kicked at the snow under his foot and clicked his bleach-white fangs,

Garfiel: “Y’didn’t drag out th’half-devil. The snow doesn’t look like it’s stoppin’. Y’didn’t bring any souvenirs and came back with nothin’ but yer stinkin’ mug. Th’fuck d’ya think yer doin’, ah?”

Subaru: “—Emilia, she... told me she loves me.”

Garfiel: “———Huh?”

Subaru’s off-beat remark might’ve been too out of place here. For a moment, Garfiel looked as if he couldn’t understand what he had just heard. But his face quickly darkened as he decided that he was being played with.

Garfiel: “Looks like the half-devil ain’t th’only one who ain’t seein’ th’situation here, hah!? Take a look where we are, and yer still bullshittin’ with me, oy!? Oyoy! Ah!?”

The heat of Garfiel's seething rage began evaporating the melted snow on his skin. And the sight of Garfiel's body swelling was no optical illusion, but the start of his transformation from human to giant tiger.

Subaru did not waver as he watched.

With the same expression as when he uttered his previous words, Subaru went on staring at him with the same dry gaze. And repeated in front of the enraged Garfiel,

Subaru: "Emilia, said that she loves me, and that all she needs is me."

Garfiel: "—Y'fuckin'..."

Subaru: "With her adorable face, her clinging voice, her tingling movements, at a distance so close that I could melt, almost touching, within range of each other's breathing... that was what she told me."

Garfiel: "So fuckin' what!? It was already obvious when y'got here that half-devil's fuckin' glued to ya. If y'wanted congratulations for y'two gettin together, rippin y'two to shreds would fuckin' do it—"

Beastial growls began mixing with his curses as Garfiel's transformation accelerated with his wrath. Ready to pounce at any moment, Garfiel jabbed his words into Subaru.

—And that was the last straw.

Subaru: "...As fucking if."

Garfiel: "Hah? Didn't hear that, y'mind repeatin'..."

Subaru: "—As fucking if Emilia would possibly tell me that she loves me!?!?"

Garfiel: "———Hk."

Subaru turned up his face and screamed.

Even Garfiel fell mute in front of this flood of emotions. Glaring at the flinching Garfiel, bearing an expression of agony, Subaru allowed his heart to erupt.

The words they shared in the Tomb, the heat of their touch, and the certainty of their love— He threw them all away. Was it painful? Of course it was painful. But, within those inseverable memories, there existed not the slightest radiance of genuine meaning.

How nice it would be, if Subaru could be foolish enough to be deceived by that counterfeit radiance. But it was Natsuki Subaru's misfortune to be incapable of being that foolish.

Subaru: "As fucking if she would say that. How could Emilia tell me that she loves me... cling to me, offer up everything to me, and tell me she needs nothing but me... That could never happen."

Garfiel: "The fuck y'goin' on about, oy?"

Subaru: "She would never lean on me this way and tell me that her feelings for me are her everything. Never— If Puck was here, there's no way she could be so utterly engrossed with me..."

He couldn't say how desperately he wished he could be placed first in Emilia's heart. But Subaru wasn't so conceited as to believe that he was nearly enough to be worthy of that place in her heart, nor did he think so little of her.

The one Emilia relied on the most, the one she would cling to till the very, very end, would always be Puck. Now that Puck would not appear before her, she was merely turning to Subaru as the secondary harbor of her reliance, nothing more.

Her confessions of love, the warmth of her fingertips, and her trembling breaths, Subaru didn't want to believe that they had all been lies.

He didn't want to— but he knew that they weren't real.

Lifting his head, Subaru glared into Garfiel. His anger seemed to have cooled, but this time, it was Subaru who bared his teeth,

Subaru: "Who was it that drove her into a corner until she had no choice but to depend on a worthless guy like me? Who made her think that she had to keep going... no matter how many times her heart had been broken, over and over! Who!?"

Garfiel: “That’s all necessary, ain’t it! That’s a choice you fuckin’ made yourself! Th’fuck’re y’tryin’ t’pin this on me... n’ the others in th’Sanctuary, hah!?”

Garfiel shot back at Subaru’s charges.

But, listening to Garfiel’s barked retort, Subaru only shook his head.

Who was it that drove Emilia into a corner? He already knew the answer without having to ask.

Subaru: “There’s no question whose fault it is... it’s my fault.”

Garfiel: “—Hah!?”

Subaru: “It’s my fault. It’s my fault that Emilia was driven into a corner. It’s my fault, it’s your fault, it’s all of your faults.”

Garfiel: “...Cut it with that bullshit. If she can’t stand th’weight and caves, ain’t that just her calibre!? If her heart’s that weak and she goes settin’ a goal that high, ain’t that just her makin’ a fuckin’ fool of herself!”

Subaru: “Yeah. You’re right. Emilia’s too gentle, so she only ever takes the pressure head-on. She never unloads her burdens on anyone else, until she crumbles— Even though that was what I was supposed to do.”

Receiving Garfiel’s rage, Subaru felt his heart growing cold just like the white snowscape around him.

“Even though that’s what I have to do”, he felt like clarifying.

Subaru: “Yeah. That’s what I have to do. That’s why I’m here... and even though I’m the one saying this, what was I doing...”

Garfiel: “Th’fuck’re y’agreein’ with yerself, oy... No, nevermind. Just, nevermind. There’s no end t’bullshittin’ with ya. «Mordoba’s thirst ain’t never get quenched». If y’can’t do it, then...”

Subaru: “You’ll go in the Tomb and bring Emilia out yourself...? You think you can actually do it?”

Garfiel: “...Th’hell’s that supposed to mean.”

Garfiel muttered this quiet threat. Though it was meant to intimidate Subaru, it only served to confirm Subaru's baseless conjecture.

Subaru: "Garfiel, I already know you're an Apostle of Greed. I know that's the only way you can be granted the command right over the Ryuzu clones."

Garfiel: "-----"

Subaru: "So it's inevitable, that being an Apostle of Greed, you must've been inside the Tomb... Or, more accurately, that you've taken the Trials."

Garfiel: "—You..."

Subaru: "You've challenged the Trials, haven't you? Though I don't know why you're so insistent on keeping it a secret. Is it because the Sanctuary's residents are forbidden to enter the Tomb? If not... then is it for Ryuzu, who entered the Tomb to save you?"

Garfiel: "-----Agh."

Garfiel's complexion changed.

After all, family was Garfiel's sore spot. Watching his expression shift to a color of agony, Subaru continued weaving his conjectures as he spoke.

Subaru: "Frederica told me about how you went inside the Tomb. And I heard that Ryuzu went in as well."

Garfiel: "That... fuckin' snitch...! Just leavin' ain't enough for her, she had to pander to th'fuckers outside... Tch."

Subaru: "What, would it be so bad if a certain someone caught wind of this? Come to think of it, who was it that made this Contract with the residents, anyway? Was it the Witch Echidna who, created this Sanctuary? If so, then have the residents of the Sanctuary been upholding a Contract with the dead all this time?"

Garfiel: "Don't y'fucking—!"

“—go any further”, Garfiel kicked into the ground, becoming one with the wind as he flew towards Subaru. Aiming his claws that could shred through steel directly at Subaru’s face—

Subaru: “—The one making the snow fall is Roswaal.”

Garfiel: “———”

Hearing Subaru strike the core of the matter, Garfiel’s claw stopped just inches from his face.

Watching a look of stupefaction rising onto Garfiel’s expression, Subaru nodded.

Subaru: “It’s not Emilia. Without Puck here, Emilia couldn’t do this by herself. Even if, on the million-to-one chance that Emilia was the one who caused this, there’s no way that girl could hide it from me with such perfection.”

Garfiel: “That’s... just yer wishful thinkin’...”

Subaru: “You’re right, but I can only believe. That girl, even if she’s completely abandoned herself, she’s not the kind of girl who’d throw a tantrum and hurt everyone around her... I just believe that.”

It may be a suspect he had arrived at through the process of elimination. But it was certainly not a baseless accusation.

Subaru: “The one binding you all to the Sanctuary... is Roswaal, isn’t it?”

Garfiel: “Y’heard that from Frederica too?”

Subaru: “Of course not... It’s me putting together information and circumstantial evidence, and then having enough preconceptions and enough of a bad impression that I don’t mind making false accusations— But looks like I was right.”

Garfiel: “———”

As Garfiel fell silent, Subaru exhaled a white sigh.

—It was just the exhaustion of finding out that the person he suspected of being the mastermind was really the mastermind. But, even if he knew that Roswaal was the one conspiring behind the scenes, he

still didn't know why he would oversee a Contract that was trapping the Sanctuary's residents here, and why he would be tormenting them with this snow. No matter how much Subaru thought, he couldn't find a plausible answer. In that case,

Subaru: "Guess we'll just take a few shots at that smug face of his."

Listening to Subaru mutter this full of resolve, Garfiel dropped his arms.

And Subaru could tell that Garfiel's face was painted with the same emotions as his own.

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Roswaal: "—Weeell now, you two ceeertainly look aaangry."

Laying on the bed in his allotted residence, Roswaal greeted Subaru and Garfiel with these words, cheerfully smiling in his usual clown makeup.

Subaru: "Yeah. I'm super pissed right now. And this one over here wants to jump on you this very minute, you know? So you might wanna be careful what you say."

Standing there blocking the doorway, Subaru spread out his arms and nudged his chin at the person beside him. On the other end of his gesture was Garfiel, who was quietly growling.

The sound of his bestial breathing was proof that he was using the last of his rationality to maintain his human form. Although they were indoors, the coldness had penetrated the masonry of the walls and passed inside. Both Subaru and Roswaal were breathing white, while only Garfiel's were bordering on red from the sheer heat of his breaths.

Roswaal: "This is an iiinteresting pairing, no? I was sure I remember Garfiel saying something about riiipping Subaru in two when he comes back?"

Garfiel: "Things've changed a bit. I'll have to put off decidin' who t'crush into paste 'till I figure out what's true or not."

Subaru: “Don’t say such scary things so naturally. Roswaal too, you shouldn’t accept that kind of scary statement like it’s normal, you know.”

Subaru’s exchange with Garfiel as he left the Sanctuary for the mansion had left him with a deep sense of self-loathing. Unable to forget that humiliation, Garfiel’s resentment towards Roswaal and Emilia wasn’t too difficult to understand.

Seeing Subaru furrow his brows, Roswaal shook his head with “Noo noooo”, as he turned his single yellow eye between Subaru and Garfiel,

Roswaal: “I was simply telling it as it iis, Subaru-kun.”

Subaru: “Sounds like I’m pretty despised. I’m hurt, Ros-chi. Weren’t you gonna do anything even if Garfiel ate me up?”

Roswaal: “Aaaya aya, now isn’t that too hard on yourself? If Subaru-kun went head-to-head with Garfiel, I’m not so sure that Garfiel would come out on tooop?”

Subaru: “You think I have a chance? If you heard my combat record you’d be shaking in your boots, you know.”

Ever since being summoned to this parallel world, Subaru had just been constantly taking damage, with barely a single combat victory to his name. He did manage to beat up the weird trio in the alley, kill a few Wolgarms, and finish off the dying Petelgeuse, but that was about it.

Subaru: “Actually, that’s a lot better than I thought... but if I’m pitted against a pissed-off Garfiel, I won’t last two seconds before I get turned into meat cubes. I can at least see that much.”

Roswaal: “I wonder. Perhaps, under the right conditions, you could put up a good fiiight, I think.”

Narrowing his eye, Roswaal looked Subaru up and down as he spoke. Unfortunately, no matter how Subaru tried to reflect on those words, he just couldn’t seem to agree.

Subaru shrugged and decided to set Roswaal’s statements aside for now, while almost simultaneously beside him, Garfiel stomped down his foot, shattering the floorboard beneath it.

Garfiel: “None’a that crap matters right now! Ain’t there somethin’ more important here, hah!? Are y’two assholes asleep?”

Leaving a deep footprint in the center of the floor, Garfiel bared his fangs and shouted at Subaru and Roswaal.

He didn’t seem too fond of their little sparring match before moving into the main topic. But then again, it didn’t suit Subaru too well either. Following Garfiel’s prompt, Subaru gave a single nod, and,

Subaru: “You’re the one making it snow outside, aren’t you, Roswaal?”

He cut straight to the chase.

Roswaal: “———”

Hearing Subaru’s question, Roswaal closed his mouth.

Subaru followed suit, and quietly waited for Roswaal’s answer. Silence descended on the room, as the only sounds audible were the howls of the freezing wind outside the window, and the steady clockwork rhythm of Garfiel’s clicking fangs.

Roswaal: “Subaru-kun.”

Subaru: “Yeah?”

Roswaal: “—Did you hear that from me?”

Subaru: “———”

What kind of question was that?

Subaru had run multiple simulations in his head about what Roswaal’s response might be.

Perhaps a boldfaced laugh like “Aha, you got me”, or a pathetic “W—what a ludicrous... proof, where’s your proof!”. Most likely, it would have been an evasive “I’m afraid I have no idea what you’re taaalking about”, or something along those lines.

But Roswaal’s reply was completely different from anything Subaru had imagined.

Subaru: “What? We just got here, how are you supposed to have told us? You sure you’re not confused?”

Roswaal: “Hmmm... Is that so. Is that so? Iis that so... Unfortunate.”

Despite chewing over the meaning of his words, Subaru only looked at Roswaal with an expression of non-understanding. After leaving him those words, Roswaal cast down his gaze, and let out a feeble sigh.

The side of his pallid face seemed even more devoid of strength than usual. And Subaru could see that it was not a result of his injuries, but a reflection of the state of his heart.

Roswaal: “—Iiin that case. I misspoke, I misspoke. I said something strange just now.”

Lifting his face again, Roswaal revealed a faint smile as if taking back what he had just said. Somehow, Subaru just felt like there was something off about that red-painted smile.

But, paying no heed to Roswaal’s subtle change, Garfiel stepped forward,

Garfiel: “Y’ain’t denyin’ it, oy?”

Roswaal: “Don’t you think that if I throw up a bunch of excuses when I’m already under suspicion, it’ll just sound like I’m lying? But on the other hand, my uuusual behavior hasn’t earned me any trust from you two eiiither.”

Garfiel: “So y’fuckin’ noticed? Then y’can probably guess what I’m about t’do next... Yeah!?”

Exhaling a sharp breath, Garfiel instantly erased their distance from several steps to zero.

Approaching the foot of the bed, Garfiel reached out his hand to grasp Roswaal by the throat. The split-second movement happened so fast that Subaru didn’t even have the time to call out to stop him. But,

Garfiel: “—You.”

???: “I will not permit such insolence in front of Roswaal-sama, Garf.”

Flying out of the adjacent room, Ram caught Garfiel by his torso and the wrist of his reaching hand. With his right arm restrained to his chest, Garfiel leered at Ram with a growl.

Subaru was surprised that he hadn't noticed Ram's presence in the house until now, but, with a sigh of relief, he was at least grateful that she had managed to avert needless bloodshed.

Then—

Roswaal: "Ram. You really are an excellent servant."

Ram: "Yes, Roswaal-sama—"

Subaru couldn't find anything strange about their exchange.

Ram had placed herself in harm's way to protect her master, and Roswaal praised her. There should be nothing wrong about this. Ram was simply carrying out her duty.

So where was the problem? Subaru looked up, furrowing his brows, wondering.

Standing near the door, Subaru could see Garfiel's back in front of his eyes, and Ram's delicate figure opposite him. Beyond them, was the bed which Roswaal had taken for his recuperation, but,

—Since when was Roswaal standing?

Subaru: "——"

It must have happened in an instant.

In the time it took Subaru to blink, Roswaal had stood up from his bed, and walked up to the standoff between Ram and Garfiel. And,

Subaru: "——"

What the hell is that?

Protruding out of Garfiel's back was what looked like a human arm.

Penetrating from the front of his chest to the center of his back, it had five writhing fingers, and Subaru was certain that it was someone's right arm.

Garfiel: "Hng, buh... uh."

Before his eyes, Garfiel's body violently convulsed.

Little by little, crimson blood stained into the back of his jacket as his legs dangled from his torso. With nothing to support his body, Garfiel dropped to his knees as the arm disappeared into his back.

And, having lost its plug, mass volumes of blood instantly spouted from the hole.

Garfiel: "—Ah."

Garfiel collapsed to the floor. Looking down at him, were Ram and Roswaal.

And sticking out of Ram's chest, was,

Ram: "Ros..."

Roswaal: "You truly were an excellent servant."

Ram tried to call his name in a feeble voice, but Roswaal gently interrupted her.

He tenderly stroke his left hand on Ram's peach-colored hair, while Ram seemed to accept it with a soft blush on her intoxicated expression.

—From the corner of her smile, a belated trail of fresh blood leaked out.

But of course.

Because her chest had been pierced through from behind.

The arm was drawn out. And Ram's delicate body, unable to withstand even the slightest force, fell forwards onto the floor.

But what caught her was the profusely bleeding Garfiel.

He took the collapsing Ram into his arms, and lifted her upright,

Garfiel: "Gh... Ros... Tch. R—Ram... Ram, Ram, Ram, RAMRAMRAMRAM!!"

The instant of hatred dominating his heart was drowned to nothing by the sight of the one he loved.

Over and over again, Garfiel screamed the name of the girl in his arms, roaring blood as he emitted pale-blue light from his hands. Subaru knew that vivid glow was from the channelling of healing magic. While it wasn't Garfiel's specialization, he was still capable of casting it.

Right now, despite the fatal wound through his chest, Garfiel was pouring his everything into healing Ram in his arms.

As he did so, with each beating of his heart, his body pulsed and transformed.

Fur covered over his exposed skin, his fangs began to grow, and his pupils instantly narrowed into slits. His muscles swelled by magnitudes, as his clothes burst apart from the overwhelming mass of his body.

He was transforming into that mindless tiger, and his bestial instinct to protect his body was furiously clashing with the rational human desire to save the life of the one he loved.

But,

Garfiel: "——"

Roswaal: "It would be troublesome if you were allowed to transform."

Slightly tilting his head, with these words Roswaal kicked his leg towards Garfiel.

His long, sweeping leg became wind, and smashed directly into Garfiel's skull— With the sound of an eggshell cracking, like some circus prop, Garfiel's head exploded into a spray of red.

Garfiel's body lost everything from the neck up. Blood spouted like a fountain from the severed stump of his neck, filling the room with its bloody stench as his corpse fell on top of Ram.

Underneath, the faint smile on Ram's expression remained unchanged.

Garfiel's healing magic had no effect. Ram's pulse had already ceased the moment Roswaal pulled his arm from the cavity of her destroyed heart.

Garfiel had simply failed to notice it as he wrenched out his lifeforce to save her.

Roswaal: “Eeeven I have trouble casting magic while sustaining a spell that can interfere with the weather in this magnitude— For a court magician, it really is an unsightly display.”

Roughly scraping his blood-drenched leg on the nearby bed sheet, having murdered Ram and Garfiel with his bare hands, Roswaal turned to the immobilized Subaru.

And, with a tone and bearing completely unchanged from usual, he spoke.

Roswaal: “Now— Shall we begin our talk? Natsuki Subaru-kun.”

Arc 4 Chapter 67 - Warlock

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 12, Chapter 4 “The Taste of Death”, Part 6

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#)

“Incomprehensible”, was the only feedback Subaru’s mind could muster as he watched the scene unravel before his eyes.

Ram lay in a pool of blood, and, on top of her, was Garfiel’s decapitated body. Standing beside their overlapping corpses, the one who had accomplished this with his bare hands, Roswaal, was wiping blood off the hems of his garment.

Having witnessed this horrifying feat, for a moment, Subaru couldn’t believe that it was Roswaal who did this.

Roswaal L. Mathers was the representative Court Magician of the Kingdom of Lugunica, one who could control extreme-tier magic at will, and possessed combat power akin to a siege engine, or so Subaru was told.

It had been what had reached his ears. And precisely because he heard this, Subaru never imagined that Roswaal could deal such destructive power without the use of his magic.

Roswaal: “«Mages are weak in close-quarters combat» is such a preeeejudiced notion. Anyone who’s ever taken up arms against me had that naturally stuck in their heads... As to what happened to those thick-headed fools, it’s as you can clearly seeee.”

Subaru unwittingly swallowed his breath at Roswaal’s perfect reading of his unvoiced thoughts.

While Roswaal traced his finger over the specks of blood that had spattered onto his face, painting over his blue eyeliner with a shade of rouge as he smiled— Demonic, in the truest sense of the word.

Subaru: “Wh... y...”

Roswaal: “Mmmmmm?”

Subaru: “Why did you kill them... kill Ram? Garfiel was... killing Garfiel was... necessary... but...”

Roswaal: “If we were to talk alone, Garfiel would’ve gootten in the way. As for Ram, I admit that what I’ve done was inexcusable. But I am not so strong as to be able to fight Garfiel heeead-on. I was only able to kill him by catching him off guard just now.”

Which meant skewering Ram and Garfiel both.

Somehow, as he listened to Roswaal’s casual explanation of why he killed them, Subaru’s emotions shed away their rage, and his mind returned it its usual calm state.

It was a ludicrous answer to a ludicrous situation. And if Subaru allowed himself to be played in the palm of his hands, giving in to his passion would only be giving Roswaal what he wanted.

Subaru: “...”

Roswaal: “Hmmmmm, that’s unexpeeected. And here I thought you’d be angry at what I said?”

Subaru: “Well, the anger’s done a whole loop around and went back to where it started... Not saying I’m not angry, though. Naturally I am. Naturally.”

Roswaal: “Iiis that right. While that is an admirable attitude, the young Natsuki Subaru I know would be howling, mad with rage right now, if it were natural. Dooon’t you think, Natsuki Subaru-kun?”

Roswaal’s single yellow pupil locked onto Subaru’s eyes.

One would often find Roswaal closing one eye and peering his gleaming yellow pupil into his targets, just like now.

And the mere thought of finding himself reflected in that blazing, yellow eye unsettled him to no end.

Subaru: “I realize how stupid I was before, but that doesn’t mean I’ll never grow up. This isn’t a situation that could be fixed by throwing a tantrum, I know that much at least...”

Roswaal: “Nooono, that’s not what I meeeant, Subaru-kun. Subaru-kun. Natsuki Subaru-kuuun.”

Roswaal stroked his unbloodied left hand through his navy-blue hair as he prodded Subaru with that infuriating address.

But even as the repugnant intonation drove an indescribable sensation into his chest, Subaru did not back down. Instead, he took a step forward, glaring into the clown’s face.

Subaru: “What are you trying to say?”

Roswaal: “What am I trying to say... if that’s what you’re asking, then this is how I’ll answer—Congratulations, and welcome. I’ve been waiting. For you to finally stand there before me.”

Subaru felt a chill like damp fingertips creeping down his spine.

In front of him, true to his word, Roswaal watched him with a look of sheer delight. That attitude, that delight, all gave Subaru an incomprehensible sense of disgust.

Roswaal didn’t appear sarcastic at all, instead seemed genuinely overjoyed for Subaru. The only problem was the inexplicable nature of his elation and of his words.

Subaru: “You’ve been waiting... for me to stand here?”

Roswaal: “Not in this particular spot in this particular room. Thaaat would be too literal of an interpretaaation. I’m sure you can understand how that is not what I meant. After all, you are the only one who should be capable of understaaanding.”

Subaru: “I’m the only one... who could understand?”

Little-by-little, it was as though the pieces were falling into place. Slowly but surely, though hesitating as he linked them, the final picture began to take shape.

The moment he grasped its meaning, “No way”, the thought pierced through his mind.

Roswaal: “Dooo you understaaand, Subaru-kun? Why is it that, when you’ve just witnessed two deaths before your eyes, you could remain so calm and keep yourself from falling into uncontrollable rage...? In fact, I’m sure you knooow why.”

Subaru: “———”

Roswaal: “Their deaths didn’t hit you with any great impact. You were shocked to see them die. There might’ve even been some reeeeeeeentment. But you felt no grief. And that is why you could not turn your anger against me, or striiike me with your fists.”

Listening to Roswaal reading him like a book, Subaru opened his mouth to object, but closed it again, unable to say a thing.

“What would you know!?”, “You think I don’t care about their deaths!?”, “How could you murder Ram and Garfiel, you monster!”. Countless rebukes came to mind.

In truth, the impulse to let his emotions explode had surged up many times inside him, each threatening to fly out of his throat, only to dissipate and fade to nothing.

He was enraged. He was shocked. He was in grief, or at least he should be.

But even so, Subaru had no words to refute Roswaal, because——

Roswaal: “——Because it can all be recovered. Isn’t that what’s going through your miiiiiiiiind?”

Subaru: “You——”

An involuntary shiver froze up his throat, gripping his heart. Without resorting to metaphors, he really felt the illusion of something clutching at his heart, so great was the shock.

Lifting his head, Subaru instinctively looked around the room, dreading that the black hand might appear to punish his trespass. This would be his first punishment since rejecting the Witch of Envy. What horror would that shadow bring at its return? Just the thought of it strangled his heart with such twisting pain that it felt like it might break. But,

Subaru: “—It didn’t come...”

Roswaal: “I wouldn’t know what you’re so wary of, but... Aaaaah, I’m sure it must have something to do with your coocontract? Iii see. That would explain the peculiarities of your words and actions up to now. I think I understand.”

Subaru: “Understand... No, before that...!”

Watching Roswaal hold his chin as he nodded, Subaru’s face turned pale as his lips trembled. Roswaal’s statement just now had no doubt struck upon Subaru’s core, and the fact that it struck meant that—

Subaru: “You... kno... know about me...!?”

Roswaal: “As far as it does not deviate from what is written, yes— You possess the power to redo. Iiisn’t that right?”

Without a shadow of a doubt, Roswaal confessed his knowledge of Return by Death.

Subaru swallowed his breath and immediately noticed the danger of the situation.

The conditions were now exactly the same as at Echidna’s tea party.

If he allowed Roswaal to continue talking about Return by Death like this, the disaster where the Sanctuary was engulfed by shadows would only be repeated.

In fact, he wouldn’t be surprised if the Witch snatched him this very instant.

Drawing the breath into his stomach and releasing it in a deep exhale, Subaru confirmed that time hadn’t stopped.

That is to say, the Witch hadn’t grasped his heart as punishment. This ruled out the possibility which, as unbearable as it may be, would also have been the safest. While the other possibility—

Roswaal: “—Silence is as good as proven admission, that is a phrase I wonder just whoooo left to the ages.”

Plunging his thoughts into risk aversion, Subaru forced his mind to turn at an incredible speed, but Roswaal, apparently growing tired of waiting, interrupted with those words.

This confession just now must have held some rather large significance to Roswaal as well.

Seeing Subaru ignore him without saying a word, Roswaal furrowed his brows in a rare sign of displeasure.

Roswaal: “Weeell, the fact that you’re not deenying it as some absurd assertion does say a lot about your hooonesty.”

Subaru: “I—”

Roswaal: “Ooooho, that’s fine. It is one thing for me say it, but there could be some unpleasant consequences if you were to confirm it. That was why you were never able to say it out loud, iisn’t it? Although...”

Stopping Subaru at the first syllable, Roswaal continued until his voice abruptly trailed off.

Seeing Subaru biting his lip, Roswaal cast him a glance with a revolting smile,

Roswaal: “Perhaps, you were also afraid of what they’d think of you if you tooold them?”

Subaru: “———Guh.”

Roswaal: “It is only naaatural. Aaafter all, the power to rewind the world is an outrageous and teeerrifying thing. Interference with time is the absolute pinnacle of the pinnacle of Yin magic. Even Beatrice, exhausting all her strength, could only bring it to a stall. But to reverse it would surely be a dream wiiiithin a dreeeam.”

Unable to refute a thing as he listened to Roswaal read into his genuine repressed fears, Subaru’s face stiffened as he suddenly heard Beatrice’s name. With Elsa’s blade plunged into her back, the final expression on her face as she vanished from existence was still vivid in his mind.

Roswaal: “——Judging from your reaction, it would seeem that Beatrice had fulfilled her roooooole...”

Subaru: “Her role... What would you... but, yes.”

As the conversation moved away from Return by Death, Subaru took the opportunity to rein in his unsettled thoughts and redirected his attention to take a bite out of Roswaal’s unruffled face.

Did this man even know about Beatrice’s lonely cries?

Subaru: “You knew how she’s been suffering... didn’t you? Bound to that mansion, clinging to a promise made in some ancient Contract... letting herself be worn to the core, huddling in a corner, you knew all of this, didn’t you!?”

Roswaal: “Ooof course I knew. Beatrice and I have knooown each other for a very long time. Since I was born, in fact. There is a loneliness in her heart, I’ve aalways known this.”

Subaru: “Then...!”

Roswaal: “Why didn’t I do anything about it? Iii would rather you did not say that. There is no one who can relieve her of her sadness other than herself, I’m sure you understaaand this?”

Just as Subaru was on the verge of screaming, he was struck down by Roswaal’s irrefutable reasoning.

Subaru could have screamed out his accusations at Roswaal just so he could hear a fragment of Beatrice’s sorrow. Although he could have, the fact was that it would’ve been meaningless.

Beatrice was already dead, and no one could heal her of the sadness of her heart.

Only Subaru, who possessed the means to rewind the world, could be there in her final moments as many times as it would take. But how was he supposed to heal four-hundred years of sorrow?

Four-hundred years— not even Subaru could reach back that far.

Watching Subaru fall silent, Roswaal slightly shook his head. Then, he said,

Roswaal: “How I eeenvy her.”

Subaru: “—Envy, her?”

Subaru repeated, pressing his voice low. But, paying it no mind, “Yes...”, Roswaal went on, nodding,

Roswaal: “How enviable it is. Beatrice fulfilled her long-cherished wish and disappeared. The fact that you are here means exaaactly that, no?”

Subaru: “Cherished... wish? She... died... like that... and you’re telling me that’s her long-cherished wish!? Are you seriously saying that!?”

Roswaal: “It was nothing more than what Beatrice desired, no? What right would we have to criticize what someone else holds dear? Neither you, nor I, have the right to sully Beatrice’s death.”

Sensible words, and impeccable logic. It was true, that they had no right.

Subaru and Beatrice may as well have been strangers. He had never understood her wish, and he never even once considered fulfilling it.

But, even so, was that really what Beatrice wanted?

—If it was, then why did she protect Subaru at the very end?

Roswaal: “Beatrice’s long-cherished wish had been fulfilled. For that, I truly envy her— Since it seems that I would no longer be able to fulfill mine.”

Subaru: “———”

There was something strange about the way he phrased it.

Subaru couldn’t tell where, or why. But it was certainly there.

Subaru: “And what is... your wish...?”

Roswaal: “I cannot say. My Contract forbids me from revealing it, and that is as much as I can say. What I have told you is already pushing the limit of what I can compromise with the Contract. But, I can tell you this.”

Subaru: “———”

Roswaal: “To see that my wish is fulfilled, I have always, always, always, always devoted my utmost. Not a single action I have taken was without purpose, and not a single one do I regret.”

Roswaal shamelessly declared without the slightest hint of remorse.

Stunned by his audacity, a black rage began boiling in Subaru’s chest.

It was a begrudging rage that was the cumulation of all the severed emotions that had built up inside him. But, although it was there, he did not lose himself in it.

Subaru: “Necessary...? Killing Ram and Garfiel, burying the Sanctuary in snow, everything... You’re saying that it was necessary...?”

Roswaal: “Hmm, as for the former... no, that would put a damper on this conversaaation. But as for the latter, yes, would be my aaanswer.”

Subaru: “For what!?!?”

Baring his teeth, Subaru swung his arms, shouting.

Subaru: “Why the hell are you doing this!? Making snow fall on the Sanctuary, tormenting the residents like it’s some sick joke... What’re you trying to accomplish!? What’s the point in doing that!? Why don’t you come out and say it! Roswaal!!”

Roswaal: “It’s entirely obvious—— To isolate Emilia-sama.”

Subaru: “——Wh... at?”

Roswaal: “I will say it again. Snow falls and the residents suffer. Emilia-sama is isolated, and descends into an unsettled state of mind. Isn’t that what happened?”

Roswaal spoke as if he had seen it himself. Indeed, Emilia’s condition inside the Tomb was exactly as Roswaal envisioned. But Subaru had no intention of admitting this.

More importantly, Roswaal’s statement just now was by far the most senseless thing Subaru had heard to date.

Roswaal: “The Sanctuary is a land closely tied with the Witch, and Emilia-sama is taking the Trials to liberate it. Aaaaaat such a time, if a natural disaster were to befall the Sanctuary... just what would people think of Emilia-sama?”

Subaru: “What...”

Roswaal: “Here is where the impulsive Garfiel comes into play. He, if anyone, would be the first to doubt Emilia-sama, and to loudly proclaim it. With the volume of his voice, anyone would begin to think the same—— That Emilia-sama was the cause of this disaster.”

Roswaal's analysis was spot-on, and Garfiel had just been dancing in the palms of his hands. From the moment Subaru returned to the Sanctuary, it was already clear that Garfiel was convinced that Emilia had caused the blizzard.

Even though there was someone else who could have done it, this land, and this world, chose to direct all its hostility towards Emilia.

All thanks to the demon named prejudice that had tormented Emilia from the start.

Roswaal: "And what happens once Emilia-sama is isolated? Despite appearances, Emilia-sama is actually a terribly weak person. It'd be no wonder if she wished to entrust everything to a person who would be willing to give her approval. And if that person could support her with their entire heart and soul, then I would be satisfied."

Subaru: "Wait... wait... wait wait wait wait wai... t."

Subaru held out his arms, calling for Roswaal to stop.

He got a feeling that he had heard something outrageous just now.

Like he had just been told some absurd, impossible fact.

Like something he mustn't hear was—

Roswaal: "You cannot turn yourself away if Emilia-sama relies on you. Of course not, since you love her. If your beloved Emilia-sama were to entrust everything to you, there is no way you could push her aside."

Subaru: "That—"

Would never happen.

At least it shouldn't.

But the fact was that, in this very loop, Subaru had managed to keep himself from drowning within Emilia's clinging embrace. He had withstood it and left her to come here.

It wasn't that he rejected the temptation of Emilia's loving whispers. It was because he knew that she didn't truly mean it, and that her fallen engrossment was merely—

Roswaal: “«That wasn't the case this time», is that how you wanted to answer? I can only say that is unfortunate. I suppose you just have a few too many superfluous things about you right now.”

Roswaal took a single, silent step towards the confounded Subaru. Hearing the sound of a splash from his foot stepping into the pool of blood, Subaru's body inadvertently froze. A groan escaped his throat,

Subaru: “Are you, going to kill me—?”

Roswaal: “Kill you, now thaaat would be a rather viiiolent idea. I would be quite troubled if you died. Since, one way or another, I will need you to rewind the woorld.”

Subaru: “Hh—?”

For a moment, Roswaal's words as he approached stunned Subaru into silence.

But he immediately noticed the discrepancy in his understanding.

Roswaal knew that Subaru could rewind time, but he didn't know that it was through Return by Death, with death acting as the trigger.

Thus, his intention was to corner Subaru so that he would willingly choose to rewind. Although, that would likely involve far more agony than if he was instantly killed.

If Roswaal had no intention of killing Subaru, then there was still a chance.

Subaru: “—Everyone! Inside now!!”

Raising his hand, Subaru shouted.

The instant Roswaal furrowed his brows, the room's doors and windows, as well as those of the adjacent living room, simultaneously shattered. And flying in alongside the frigid wind, were small, scrawny shadows, numbering twenty in all— each of them a little girl with light-pink hair.

Seeing the assembly of identical girls lined up in a row, Roswaal turned his single eye towards Subaru,

Roswaal: “And here I thought the command right was transferred back to Garfiel?”

Subaru: “We were venturing into the maybe-mastermind’s den, after all— Of course we had to bolster the cards in our hand.”

—The exchange took place after his argument with Garfiel outside the Tomb.

After persuading Garfiel to go on ahead, Subaru went to the crystal room and transferred the command right back to himself.

Then, he ordered the Ryuzu clones to surround the building where Roswaal was convalescing and to prepare to break inside in case of emergency.

Rem, who had temporarily been Garfiel’s hostage, was entrusted to the current representative Ryuzu Meyer, who brought her to the cathedral, where the rest of the residents and Arlam villagers had taken refuge.

He had taken all these measures on the assumption that Roswaal was the culprit.

—Although, naturally, Subaru never anticipated that Roswaal would kill Garfiel and Ram.

Roswaal: “So, what do you wish to do, now that you haaave me surrounded?”

Subaru: “The fact that you’re that strong with your bare hands was a surprise, but you’re outnumbered. If a single beastified Garfiel could give you trouble, you’ll probably have a hard time when you’re swarmed...”

The reason Roswaal skewered Ram along with Garfiel was because he wasn’t confident facing Garfiel in direct combat. And although there was no question that Roswaal was infinitely stronger than Subaru—

Subaru: “Twenty of them should be about enough to overwhelm you. We’ll beat you up, pin you down, and make sure you spit out everything that you’re still hiding.”

Roswaal: “You should know how important it is to uphold the terms of one’s Contract, being bound by siiimilar ones yourself?”

Subaru: “Too bad, mine was kinda one-sided forced on me without me having any say in the matter and just punishes me whenever I violate it. This time it hasn’t come though, so I’m still in the safe-line!”

With over twenty people crammed inside, the small house was packed to the brim.

Obedying Subaru’s signal, the emotionless Ryuzu replicants surged towards Roswaal as a sea of faces.

Meeting their charge with his bare hands, Roswaal could only handle two at a time. His manipulation of the weather outside had become his own downfall. Deprived of the use of his magic, Roswaal would only be swarmed by sheer numbers.

Subaru figured that while it would be close, victory was assured. However,

Roswaal: “—I may be outnumbered.”

Subaru: “———”

Roswaal: “But when your opponent is a mage, trying to overpower him with sheer numbers is just an overly foooolish decision.”

At the fall of his voice, an infernal flame swept through the room, and every Ryuzu Meyer replicant caught in its path was scorched to their core.

In the matter of an instant, their small, charging bodies were incinerated from head to toe by the wall of flames, reduced to ash and to the Mana from whence they came.

All this, in Subaru’s eyes, was nothing more than a momentary wave of heat and light that had flashed across the room.

Subaru: “How’re you... still using magic...?”

Roswaal: “I wouldn’t have been able to if I was still controlling the weather. Unfooortunately, I have already lost any reason to sustain this snowfall. So it’s been a while since I’ve stopped. Sorry, I suppose I should’ve told you eaaarlier.”

Subaru: “Wh—Guh, kha.”

In Subaru's moment of confusion, Roswaal flashed forward and took him by the throat. He didn't know where those slender wrists had gotten that kind of strength, but he felt his legs leaving the ground as Roswaal lifted him writhing into the air.

Subaru: "Kgh—!"

Crashing backwards through a half-shattered windowpane and out of the building, Subaru landed in the snow, rolling until he was stopped by a wall.

Spitting out the mixture of mud and snow in his mouth, he lifted his face.

The remaining Ryuzu replicants quietly followed Roswaal out of the building. Since they were given no further orders, they appeared at a loss as to what to do.

But Subaru was just as lost as to what to tell them.

Roswaal: "Even after all this, you have yet to rewiiind... Ooor, perhaps you already have? Come to think of it, what happens to my consciousness when the redo occurs is still a complete mystery to me. Now, this is quiiite the predicament."

Walking over to Subaru's side, Roswaal tilted his head.

Looking up at the clown's face amidst the suffocating pain, an abrupt question escaped Subaru's lips.

Subaru: "Ros... waal... you keep on asking me to rewind over and over, but..."

Roswaal: "Mm? You have something impooortant to say? Let's hear it, let's hear it."

Subaru: "You're the one I've got a problem with here. Doing all this on the assumption that someone else has the ability to rewind the world... You must be out of your mind... Unless, you actually have..."

A way to carry over your memories?

Could Roswaal also have the ability to read the memories of the previous worlds, just like Echidna in her Citadel of Dream?

If not, then his blind desire to reset the world would just be far too incomprehensible.

Subaru: “If not... that’s fine. But, if you do... perhaps you and I... could...”

Collaborate, maybe.

Roswaal’s goals were mysterious and unknown, and he had done many unforgivable things. Subaru would never forgive him for the murder of Ram and Garfiel, or the way he had cornered Emilia. But Subaru was in no position to discard Roswaal’s strength out of emotion. In fact, he needed it badly.

If you’re going to eat poison— or however that saying goes, assuming it applies here, Subaru was also prepared to lick the plate.

Roswaal: “—It seems, that is nooot to be.”

But Subaru’s thin sliver of hope was severed by a shake of Roswaal’s head.

Roswaal turned away from Subaru’s downcast eyes, and pointed towards the end of his gaze,

Roswaal: “Goa.”

A small flame rose and set the corner of the forest where Roswaal was looking at alight. Subaru blinked at the abrupt act of destruction, when he heard, amidst the noise of crackling wood, yet another sound.

—It was the sound of a small, small animal dying.

Subaru: “—No, way.”

Roswaal: “lil see... So this is how the end comes.”

Springing to his feet, Subaru’s face paled as he scanned his surroundings. Simultaneously, Roswaal shifted his posture, and with several crisp snaps of his fingers, the scent of burning flesh and shrill, ear-splitting cries coursed throughout the Sanctuary.

Then, when a charred corpse landed in front of his eyes with a thud, Subaru clearly understood.

Subaru: “The Great... Rabbit...!!”

It was one of the Great Rabbits.

As they began slowly trickling out of the forest, Roswaal burned them one-by-one with his magic. And even as they came in droves, they remained Roswaal's prey.

No matter how great their numbers grew, they could gain no ground against Roswaal. Witnessing this, a terror gripped Subaru's heart and would not let go.

Every time he closed his eyes, the memory of being eaten by razor sharp teeth would be revived. The sense of loss, the experience of having his fingers, body, and organs ripped to shreds was beyond description.

Subaru could hear his very soul shrieking at the sight of the Witchbeasts' approach.

Subaru: "But this is only the fifth day... there should still be half a day left!"

Roswaal: "It's the snow."

Subaru: "Snow—!?"

Roswaal: "Where there is magic powerful enough to manipulate the weather, naturally, the atmosphere would be oversaturated with Mana. Not to mention that everyone in the Sanctuary has gathered inside the cathedral thanks to the snow. For a nearby Witchbeast, this is an all too enticing feeeeeding ground."

"Then...", Subaru shuddered at Roswaal's quiet observation.

Following his logic, the single most dangerous place in the Sanctuary during the Great Rabbits' attack would be—

Subaru: "Th—the cathedral! We have to hurry to the cathedral...!"

Roswaal: "It's too late. The instant they appeared before us and our small number, it meant the arrival of those who had failed to already obtain food— Eeeeeeeveryone's gone."

Subaru: "But! That's where...!"

Rem is.

Having entrusted her to Ryuzu, that was where Rem was taken. Alongside the Sanctuary's residents and the refugees from Arlam Village, there would be over a hundred people in the cathedral.

With everyone gathered there, he didn't even want to think about it.

Subaru: "Roswaal! Truce! Anyway, let's get to the cathedral! We'll collect the survivors, just get them somewhere sa..."

Subaru rushed up to Roswaal, grabbed him by the collar and screamed. But Roswaal gently pushed Subaru arms away,

Roswaal: "Flee? Where, exactly? There is a barrier. The people of the Sanctuary cannot flee."

Subaru: "Th—that's..."

Roswaal: "There wasn't enough time, Subaru-kun. The residents of the Sanctuary cannot leave unless the Trials are overcome. That is to say, your wish will not be granted."

Collapsing, Subaru fell rear-first into the snow.

Shuffling against themselves, the Ryuzu replicants gathered around the fallen Subaru, waiting for their next instruction in a rather humorous scene.

And only then, did Subaru notice it.

That Roswaal, who had been incinerating swathes of oncoming Witchbeasts as they appeared up to now, had completely stopped doing so.

Subaru: "R—Roswaal! If you stop... Unless you're out of mana..."

Roswaal: "Nooo no, it's no such thing? Since, in a sense, my Mana is inexhaustible. It wouldn't run out so easily... What has run out is my reason to live."

Little-by-little, white furballs began plodding out of the forest.

Leaving small pawprints in the pristine snow that was as white as their fur, they were certainly drawing closer.

Subaru: “E—even if I can rewind... this kind of... At least we should talk it through first! You might think you’re ok with leaving it to the next try, but...”

Roswaal: “You seeem to have misunderstooood something, Subaru-kun.”

Subaru: “Huh?”

Roswaal: “Even if you can rewind, I cannot. The me you meet after your rewind will not be me. This is my end— But thaaat is fine.”

Subaru was struck dumb by Roswaal’s words.

“The rewind won’t apply to me”, Roswaal admitted it himself. That is to say, Roswaal only knew that Subaru was someone who could potentially Return by Death, and his death here would mean the end of this Roswaal’s consciousness.

He had accepted it, and was nonetheless ordering Subaru to rewind, though he would no longer exist after Subaru returns. That way of thinking is just,

Subaru: “Not... how humans think at all...”

Unlike Subaru, whose consciousness would continue, Roswaal’s would not, and his death would be the end.

What kind of human would accept it without question, knowing that it would be the end?

Roswaal: “The day will come when you will truly surpass me, Subaru-kun.”

Subaru: “Ro... s.”

Roswaal: “Liiisten well, Subaru-kun— This is important. The one thing that is truly, truly important to you. Cast away everything else except that one thing. Let go of everything else except that single thing, and think only of protecting your single most important thing to the end.”

Subaru: “———”

Roswaal: “If you do that——”

Roswaal raised a finger as if to lecture.

A nearby rabbit immediately leapt up and chomped down on his lifted wrist. Blood scattered, and Roswaal's right arm was gnashed to bits from the wrist, while other jaws sank their fangs into his elbows, shoulders, and all over his body with the dull creak of tearing flesh.

Subaru: "ROSWAAAAAAAAAAAAAL!!"

Roswaal: "—You too, can become like me."

The body of a rabbit with its mouth wide open blotted out the clown's smile.

The swarm of white rabbits completely covered over Roswaal's body. He fell sideways, offering no resistance as the rabbits devoured his flesh. Devoured. Devoured.

Blood sprayed, meat flung out, and the white snow was dyed crimson red. Then even the crimson snow was greedily slurped up by the rabbits without leaving a drop.

Subaru watched in silence, as Roswaal ceased to be Roswaal. Watched, as Roswaal's existence was eaten and wiped from this world.

—He went on watching.

This Roswaal was eaten by rabbits in front of Subaru's eyes. And his consciousness would not follow Subaru to the world beyond death. He may be staking his wishes on Return by Death, same as Subaru, but the weight of the toll was nowhere near the same.

Because, unlike Subaru, Roswaal could not reclaim the price he had paid.

Subaru: "—Uh, ugh."

Recalling the macabre image of Roswaal's death as he ran, Subaru was hounded by the urge to vomit.

Bile surged up, burning his throat. But he couldn't spare even the time to puke as he wandered through the Sanctuary in search of survivors.

—Hell unfolded before Subaru once again.

Snow had stopped falling on the Sanctuary, but the howling wind persisted.

Lifting his face, grimacing at the skin-shearing cold as he gazed about his surroundings, he could hear the animals' calls all around, intermixed with the wind.

Grinding, grinding, the noise of serrated teeth grinding besieged the Sanctuary as if voicing their threat to their prey.

The Great Rabbit prowled through the Sanctuary in search of their feed.

Just how terrible was the hunger and famine that assaulted them?

When they fail to find prey, as if not to waste time letting their teeth stand idle, they would stave off their hunger by biting into their companions. A true, abominable monster.

Bit-by-bit, the grating noise of gnawing teeth and their cannibalistic shrieks of death and ecstasy chipped away at Subaru's sanity.

Subaru: "—Uwa!"

While trying to shake off that appalling cacophony, the wide-open jaws of a hare shot over Subaru's head. Teeth clicked viciously upon teeth as it tumbled into the snow. Having missed its prey, the rabbit flipped around with a threatening hiss.

Immediately, a Ryuzu clone running alongside Subaru crushed her heel into the rabbit's torso.

With the sound of meat squishing and bones cracking, the rabbit puked out its body's innards from its mouth, dead. Exhaling, paying no heed to the corpse, Subaru resumed his sprint as the Ryuzu clones moved out alongside him.

Not far behind them, other rabbits arrived at the crushed corpse. Hearing the sound of the corpse devoured in an instant, the bells of doom inside Subaru rang ever louder.

Six Ryuzu clones remained at Subaru's side.

The eleven who had been present at Roswaal's death had had their numbers cut by half.

Having been ordered to protect Subaru, some had turned to face the charging rabbits, while some used their bodies to shield him before returning to Mana.

As for why he ordered the clones to protect him with their lives, Subaru had already given up trying to explain it. Right now, the only thing on his mind was the safety of Rem in the cathedral and of Emilia inside the Tomb, while all else was abandoned somewhere beyond his considerations.

That was the only way to justify his present actions, and to safeguard his own sanity.

Subaru: "Th... cathedral...!"

Avoiding the rabbit-infested roads with the snow pulling at his steps, Subaru took a large detour around the Sanctuary to reach the center of the village and the cathedral.

In a village devoid of any source of light, Subaru immediately spotted the cathedral.

But, of course.

—Since amidst this world of white, only the cathedral was enveloped in pure-red flames.

Subaru: “—Wh, y?”

Falling to his knees in the snow, Subaru muttered in a hoarse daze.

The crackling of the sprawling blaze mixed with the sound of snapping wood as Subaru watched rabbits leaping into the flame like moths, intending to eat the prey inside only to be instantly burned to a crisp.

The fact that they were so desperate to enter the cathedral meant that there was still something to satisfy their hunger inside. And the fact that there were those who remained inside the flames, meant that—

Subaru: “—”

—Deciding survival was hopeless, rather than be eaten by rabbits, they had chosen to commit suicide. Subaru wasn’t incapable of understanding this feeling. He wasn’t incapable, but,

Subaru: “Even so... could’ve resisted to the end...”

“I wish you would’ve fought on to the very end without giving up on life”. But perhaps, that was way too heartless a thought. Both Roswaal and the people of the Sanctuary had treated their lives with excessive neglect.

Nearly forgetting that he himself was most guilty of that charge, Subaru covered his face as tears streamed from his eyes.

Neither Roswaal nor Subaru had inspired enough hope for the residents of the Sanctuary and the refugees of Arlam to resist until the very end. If Subaru had managed to build that kind of trust, surely, they wouldn’t have given up until the last moment.

—Once again, everything was Subaru’s fault, and Subaru’s crime.

Subaru: “But even if... only Rem...”

...Survived? This ordering of the value of life was just the height of hubris and pride.

Mentally, Subaru called out to the clone he had instructed to take Rem to the cathedral— the current Ryuzu personality. But he could find no visible reaction indicating that she had heard it.

—Rem was inside that burning cathedral.

Or, even if they escaped, Subaru was not nearly naive enough to think that Ryuzu could have single-handedly protected Rem from the Great Rabbit as they ran.

He clenched down on his molars. There was the taste of blood.

Biting into the bloody taste, into the surging bitterness, Subaru clenched onto his decision— He should have already realized that this world was lost, and that he only wound up here because of his repeated refusal to accept it.

But now, it was truly about time to give up.

Subaru: “—”

He could hear the hunger-plagued monster approaching.

That was because the rabbits, who had abandoned the prospect of devouring any prey in the burnt cathedral, had noticed the presence of the kneeling Subaru and the Ryuzu clones surrounding him.

Standing up, brushing off the snow, Subaru spilled a deep exhale. He did not notice the sensation of the tears streaming down his cheeks. And so, he did not wipe them away.

Subaru: “Emilia...”

This world was ending.

And even if it wasn’t ending, Subaru would make sure that it ends.

In a world in which everyone he wished to be with, to live with, and to save, was gone— At least, at the very end, he wanted to be at the side of the girl he loved.

Subaru: “Use your lives... to protect me— Once I reach the Tomb... you’re free to do whatever you want.”

Subaru emotionlessly relayed to the six remaining clones. He took one step, and then another, away from the horde of rabbits, until he was running.

Sensing their prey's intention to escape, the rabbits raised an inaudible cry as they hounded Subaru's trail, drooling from their mouths.

Ryuzu: "—"

Two Ryuzu clones dived into the Great Rabbit's mass just as it was poised to leap.

It was followed by the sound of death and crushing flesh, until the two of them were surrounded by the ever-swelling swarm. In an instant, the two were completely coated in white fur and fell to their sides—
Fatally wounded, their small bodies transformed into streams of pale-blue light.

And, with their final attack, they caught the feeding rabbits in an explosion of Mana, lighting up the Sanctuary's night sky with its dancing radiance.

Sensing the clones' final burst of brilliance on the skin of his back, Subaru shook his head to cast off the ones he had deserted, gritted his teeth, and ran for the Tomb.

—And just went on running.

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By the time Subaru arrived at the Tomb, his body could no longer feel the cold.

The snow had clouded his vision, and it felt like his eyelashes were frozen, but, spilling a white breath from his shivering lips, Subaru didn't seem to care.

The only thing his heavy, leaden thoughts could envision was a single, solitary girl.

With his footsteps echoing upon the stone-tiled corridor, Subaru headed into the depths.

At the Trials room, there would be a girl whom he had put to sleep, waiting for him.

??? : "—Subaru?"

When he reached the open space, a voice like a silver chime called out his name.

Letting his feet be lured in by that voice, he entered the room. And, upon seeing him, the one who called to him raised a voice full of delight.

Emilia: “So it is you, Subaru! Geez, where did you go? I was soooo worried.”

Emilia ran up to him with skipping steps and took him by the hand.

Pouting, she pressed his hand against her chest, transferring over her tender warmth as she looked up,

Emilia: “...Are you tired?”

Subaru: “Yeah... Maybe, just a little... tired.”

Emilia: “Teehee, I see. In that case... in that case...”

Emilia giggled at Subaru’s straightforward admission, her cheeks blushing red. Then, still holding onto Subaru’s hand, she suddenly sat down on the spot. Folding her legs and sitting on her side, she pulled the half-crouching Subaru closer,

Emilia: “Here, go ahead, Subaru.”

Subaru: “...A lap... pillow?”

Emilia: “Yep. Subaru, you like my lap pillows, don’t you? That’s what you told me. I do remember these things, you know. Here, go oooooon.”

She gave her lap a pat, smiling as if both proud and embarrassed at the same time. Obediently, Subaru sat down and settled his head on her soft thighs. The moment his short hair brushed against her skin, Emilia let out an enticing “Mnnn”, but soon proceeded to stroke his head with practiced form.

Emilia: “How many times is it now, that I’ve given Subaru a lap pillow?”

Subaru: “Not sure... This is the third, I guess... Somehow, it’s always when I’m exhausted and broken.”

Emilia: “You know, Subaru, it’s fun to fiddle around with your hair and cheeks... Taaake that, fiddlefiddleeee.”

Pulling on his bangs and poking her finger into his cheeks, Emilia happily played with Subaru’s head.

Knowing that it was an expression of her affection, he didn't feel the slightest urge to push her fingers away.

In a world that was ending—for now, he just wanted to drown in Emilia's love.

—Because he had already lost most of his blood and viscera.

The goriness of Subaru's current state would make any normal person want to look away.

His back had been scoured by fangs, and one could probably see the bones if he lifted up his clothes. Profuse blood was streaming from his demolished thighs, and on his right hand, which he used to swat away the incoming rabbits, only his thumb remained intact.

Perhaps it was delusional tenacity that led his murky consciousness here. That, along with the freezing cold that had ironically dulled the sensations of his body.

Emilia: "Subaru, did you get a little lighter?"

Subaru: "I'm trying out the blood-loss diet... it's... like dump the ballast, and get lighter and light... er... Something... like that..."

Emilia: "I don't understand what you're saying, but you did something crazy for someone else again, didn't you? That's the kind of person you are, Subaru. I know that, but... I still get reeaally worried."

Subaru: "..."

Emilia: "The truth is, I only want you to do that... for me. But I know that's being selfish, and I wouldn't want to see Subaru pretend not to care about anyone else because of me... Even though that's me being selfish too... sorry."

Emilia's rapid-fire words grew distant.

Unlike the frigid cold outside, the Tomb's interior retained a certain level of warmth. This ironically restored Subaru's metabolism to its normal levels, and renewed his sedated bloodflow.

Fresh blood dyed the stone slabs red, as even more was coughed out of Subaru's mouth. Dots of splattered blood stained onto Emilia's white cheeks. But—

Emilia: “Say, Subaru, are you listening? There are so, so, sooo many things I want to tell you, and ask you. So, please. Stay with me. Listen to my voice. And let me hear yours, ok?”

Emilia didn’t seem to mind the touch of blood on her cheeks.

Or rather, she never even noticed them. Her amethyst eyes were on Subaru, and were certainly seeing him— but they simply hadn’t accepted the reality they reflected.

From the moment Subaru set out from the mansion, he was already littered with the marks of Elsa’s torture. Being dragged to the Tomb by Garfiel must have only worsened his miserable appearance.

But Emilia didn’t make note of Subaru’s wounds, or seemed at all worried.

Even now, with various parts of his body missing, eaten by rabbits, she didn’t react any differently.

Right now, Emilia wasn’t seeing reality. And perhaps, Subaru was just the same.

Subaru: “———”

He was supposed to warn Emilia of the danger and take her far away from here.

The Great Rabbit had already overrun everything outside the Tomb, and would probably rush inside at any moment. When they do, Emilia wouldn’t stand a chance.

Just like Roswaal, and the villagers who chose to die in the fire, Emilia would not escape a cruel and gruesome death.

But, even knowing this, Subaru didn’t warn her.

Because, within moments of losing his life— he couldn’t escape his selfish desire to face the end at Emilia’s side.

Roswaal’s words and grisly demise, the regret for Garfiel and Ram’s deaths, the devastation of losing Petra and Frederica, and the sense of powerlessness of his inability to save Rem and Emilia, all struck Subaru to the core.

Pain, or even the terror of death, none of it mattered anymore.

—Right now, all he wanted was to vanish from this world.

Subaru's haphazard and selfish wish would be fulfilled. The world was clouding over, while little-by-little, his consciousness and his soul fell away from this place.

Strength deserted his limbs, and the last of his sensations left his body.

All that remained, all that stayed behind, was Emilia, seemingly unaware of Subaru's departure.

Subaru: "——"

So, was he going to leave Emilia behind?

When he was the only one she could rely on, when she had lost everyone else she could depend on, was Subaru going to leave her too?

Subaru: "Ah——"

It was too late to regret it now. It was too late to do anything. Without uttering a sound, life faded from his eyes.

Emilia didn't seem to notice it, but only adorably tilted her head at Subaru, who had gone quiet. Then, she smiled, and brought her face closer——

Emilia: "Subaru——"

Subaru: "——"

She took the silent Subaru. And kissed him on the lips.

——His first kiss was of the cold taste of death.

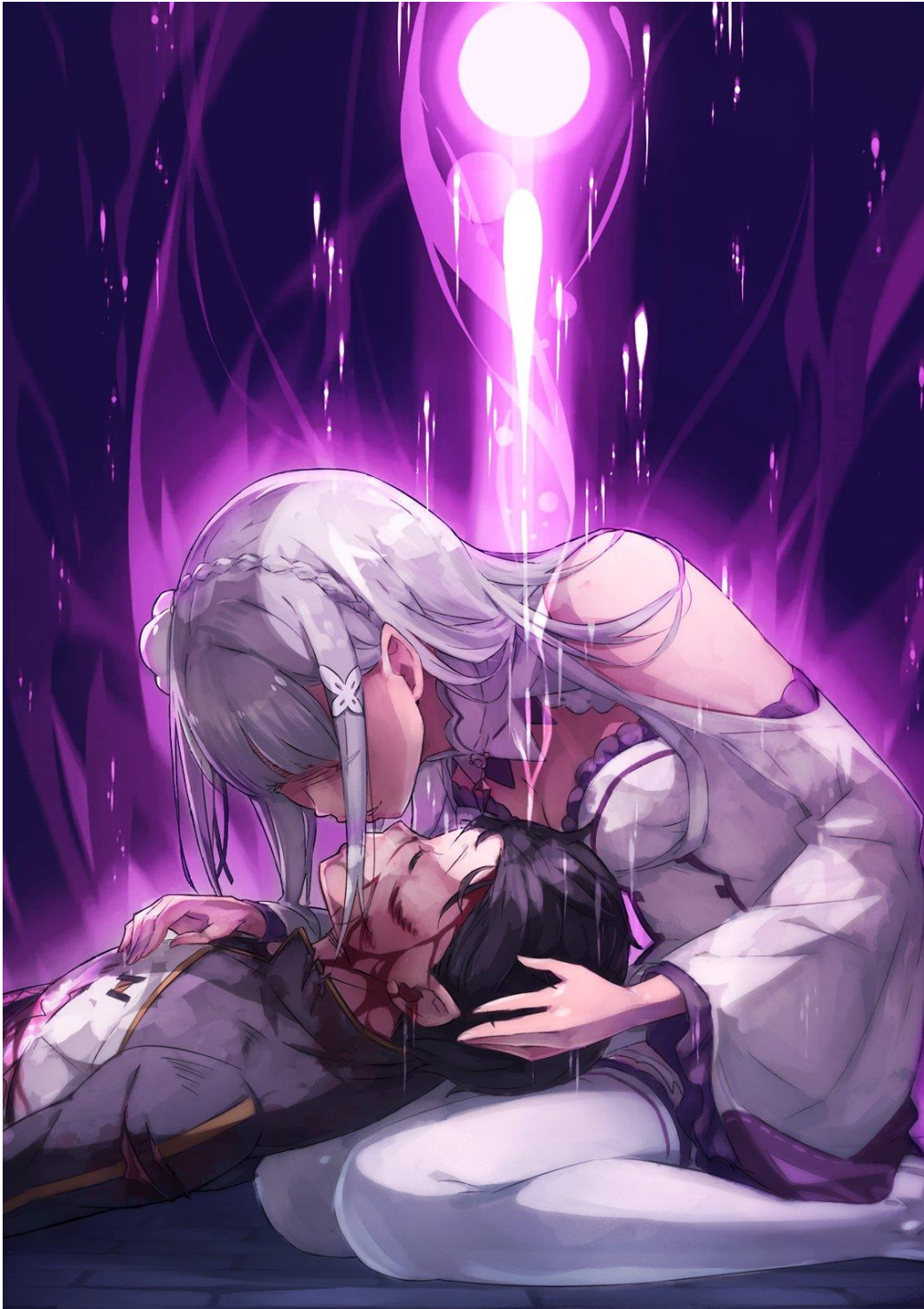


Illustration from Volume 12, coloring by Xarlasar ([source](#))

Arc 4 Chapter 69 - Liar

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 12, Chapter 5 “Ending List”, Parts 1-4

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#)

Feeling the touch of the hard ground, cold as always, Subaru’s consciousness was pulled back to reality.

Lying flat on his stomach, he opened his eyes and pushed himself up while spitting out the dirt and gravel in his mouth. He looked about his surroundings and found himself in a murky darkness.

—It was the Trial Room inside the Tomb.

From the same spot as it ended, Subaru’s world began anew.

Although a part of him was relieved to have managed to come back, the suffocating prospect of repeating the same hell in this world clenched onto his heart and would not let go.

Shaking his head, Subaru rejected those ominous portents of another dead-end.

Then, standing up and brushing the dirt off his clothes as he scanned around the area— he found Emilia, collapsed in a corner of the room.

Subaru: “...”

But just before he could call out and run over to her side, Subaru hesitated.

What scraped across his mind was the scene that immediately preceded his return— of Emilia with him dying in her lap, oblivious to his departure as she shared with him a kiss. Without meaning to, Subaru touched a finger to his lips and furrowed his brows at the dry sensation.

In those last moments, Subaru's face must have been a mess from all the blood he had coughed up. He couldn't possibly understand what Emilia was thinking when she kissed him, but it was certainly not a memory which he would remember fondly.

Just as it had been when he was on the verge of death, though he could remember it happening, no emotion or tactile sensation carried over to the present world.

It was Subaru's first kiss, as well as the first kiss he shared with Emilia. But, having been obstructed by the unreasonable barrier of death, it had left him no notable impression.

Subaru: "———"

Yet, Subaru's hesitation was not the result of that regret.

His reflection on that kiss was not for sentimentality's sake, but for the enormity of the dangers surrounding Emilia— The way she had clung to Subaru, utterly detached from reality.

With Puck refusing to show himself, she was crushed by the pressure from the villagers and the Sanctuary's residents. And when even her last support, Subaru, left her, Emilia's heart was finally broken.

If the result was her falling into that state, then what had happened to Emilia in all those loops up to now?

Subaru: "..."

Subaru had left the Sanctuary for the mansion four times now. Of all those times, the last was the only one where he had managed to come back to her— Then what became of Emilia in those other three loops?

In each of those loops, the Great Rabbit would have attacked the Sanctuary.

Even if Emilia had managed to keep her sanity intact, it wouldn't be hard to imagine the outcome considering the Witchbeast's ferocity. But just what must have been going through her mind back then?

Subaru: "As if there's any point in asking... If it turns out like that every time I leave, I'll have no choice but to stay around..."

Nothing about their situation inspired optimism.

He could leave everything to the future and distract himself from what was happening around him, but that would be pointless.

To reach the perfect future, Subaru must constantly assume the worst possible continuation.

Assume that the world would always prepare for him the cruelest, most unreasonable fate.

In that case, the problems surrounding Emilia, Beatrice, Elsa, and Roswaal would naturally always be arranged in the most difficult way possible.

Subaru: “What I’ll have to do is...”

Save Emilia from being broken, save the people of the Sanctuary from the Great Rabbit, and save his friends at the mansion from Elsa’s violence— No doubt, it would be a perilous path.

—Can it really be done?

Inside, the weak part of himself was asking, while preparing escape routes, excuses, and safeguards.

—It’s not a matter of can or cannot, all there is left, is to do it.

Subaru bared his teeth at that weakness inside himself and declared his resolve not to betray his vow.

All he had to do was to retry as many times as necessary to clear away the obstacles, confirm the victory conditions, sort out the chronology, and determine the best use of his time.

Even if Subaru’s heart would be worn down by every failure, even if it meant having to witness things he’d never want to witness, as long as it brought him closer to grasping that perfect future, then it’d suit him just fine.

That was why—

Subaru: “—Emilia. Are you alright?”

Reaching out, he shook the shoulder of the collapsed, lovely girl.

Emilia's eyelids twitched at Subaru's touch, as her consciousness was brought out of the world of the Trials and back to reality.

Her eyes opened, reflecting Subaru inside their amethyst gleam. Within seconds, tears welled up, rejecting her past as she clung tightly onto Subaru.

Accepting Emilia's reach for his support, Subaru returned her embrace as he silently reaffirmed the promise he had made.

—He would protect Emilia to the very end, as well as save everyone there is to save.

Because there was no one except Natsuki Subaru who could do this.

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He began organizing the chaotic information from the end of the previous loop.

Most important among them, was that concerning Roswaal L. Mathers. The same Roswaal who, right in front of his eyes, had lost his life, becoming the Great Rabbit's feed.

Roswaal knew about Subaru's Return by Death. Even if he didn't know that death was the trigger, he was aware of Subaru's ability to rewind.

Though Subaru wasn't sure if Roswaal had learned of this after his arrival at the Sanctuary, or if he had known long before that, most likely, it was written in Roswaal's Gospel.

Subaru hadn't been able to recover Roswaal's Gospel in the previous loop.

If the Gospel had been tucked in Roswaal's robes, then it would have been swallowed by the rabbits alongside his flesh. But even if Roswaal had left it in the residence, Subaru was in no state of mind to run inside to check.

And so, Subaru never got to see what was recorded inside.

—Or just what Roswaal's ultimate objective might be.

If Roswaal was only acting according to the Gospel's text, then what made him abandon his life in the end? —Perhaps the answer lay in the Gospel itself.

Most likely, Roswaal would obey the Gospel even if it cost him his life.

Subaru didn't know what format the entries in Roswaal's Gospel would be written in, but they should be instructions, signposts towards its owner's desired future, just like in Petelgeuse's Gospel.

When something deviated from the Witch Cultist's Gospel, Petelgeuse would use his own judgement to improvise within a reasonable range until the outcome matched the records.

But it was very different for Roswaal.

Acting with the knowledge that it was possible to rewind the world, when the future differed from what was written, he would give up his own life just so he wouldn't have to endure the time that would pass in error.

When reality differed from the text, Petelgeuse chose to improvise.

Whereas, refusing to permit the slightest deviance, Roswaal insisted that reality must follow the writ.

Though they were both dangerous adversaries in possession of Gospels, and even if the contents of their Gospels were largely the same, their approaches were almost complete opposites.

Considering the manner in which they relied on their Gospels, Subaru couldn't help but find Roswaal's to be the more misguided of the two.

—The problem lay in the contents of Roswaal's Gospel.

If the outcomes of the attacks on the Sanctuary and the mansion were all recorded in its pages, then the tragedy would only repeat over and over again until Roswaal's wishes are fulfilled.

Even the snowfall in the Sanctuary could be attributed to Roswaal's desire to match the Gospel's prophecies. Which means, the snow was probably a part of every loop. The only reason Subaru hadn't encountered it until now was because it always started after he had left for the mansion, and he never returned in time to see it.

Roswaal had induced the snowfall on the Sanctuary in order to isolate Emilia.

But just what was the point of doing that?

Even without such roundabout methods, the unbearable pressure from all sides should have been enough to wear her down. With her sense of duty and being acutely aware of the expectations of those around her, Emilia could only bite down on her unease and powerlessness and continue challenging the Trials.

The moment Subaru was no longer at her side, she would lose her way and descend into a state of self-abandon.

Unless, that was Roswaal's goal to begin with?

But if Emilia stopped acting for "Everyone else's sake", the Sanctuary would never be liberated. And without liberating the Sanctuary, there would be no escape when the Great Rabbit attacked.

There were too many places where Roswaal's actions and attitude towards Emilia were at odds.

More than anything, there were Roswaal's final words, moments before he was devoured by the Great Rabbit.

—Cast away everything except the one most important to you.

That was what Roswaal had whispered.

If you do that, you too, can become like me.

Disregarding whether Subaru wanted to become like Roswaal, the underlying implication of those words was that Roswaal had abandoned everything except what was most important to him, and that was how he wound up here.

In fact, it was a resolve for which he could relinquish his life— there was no doubt in that regard.

If everything followed the Gospel's writ— Emilia was driven into isolation, and events progressed exactly as Roswaal intended, would he really obtain that thing for which he was willing to abandon all else?

Or, perhaps a better question would be— why did Roswaal tell Subaru all this? In any case—

Subaru: “If you’re telling me to let go... there’s no way I could do that.”

Emilia was important. But it goes without saying, that there were people who Subaru wanted to protect and to keep at his side, far too many to count.

In Subaru’s narrow world, even the loss of a single fragment would forever render that world colorless.

Greedy and selfish as he was, there was no way he could permit it.

And so, he could never follow Roswaal’s advice.

Subaru: “Roswaal... I— will never become like you.”

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Subaru comforted the crying Emilia until she fell asleep, and brought her out of the Tomb.

As usual, while everyone was shocked to see Emilia in her state and to learn that she had failed the Trials, Subaru carried her to Ryuzu’s house to put her to bed.

Along the way, Garfiel’s feigned cheerfulness out of consideration for the atmosphere was almost painful to watch, and Subaru could notice Ryuzu casting him a meaningful gaze, though he didn’t mention anything.

He overlooked the former on purpose because there was still something he had to confirm.

As for the latter, it was because Subaru already somewhat understood the meaning behind her gaze.

Garfiel: “Oy, borrow y’for a minute.”

After entrusting the sleeping Emilia to Ram, Garfiel called out to Subaru while everyone was leaving for the night. Having been expecting this, Subaru answered with a “Yeah”, as he followed behind the slouching figure, heading into the forest surrounding the Sanctuary.

Subaru wasn't sure if Garfiel was bringing him to the same spot as last time, but he could tell that Garfiel's expression was exactly the same as back then.

With eyes blazing, Garfiel locked his glare onto Subaru. In stark contrast to his attitude as they left the Tomb, his hostility was now plain as day.

Naturally, the first question to come out his mouth was—

Garfiel: "What d..."

Subaru: "«What did y'bastard see in the Tomb»... yeah?"

A blue vein was about to bulge from Garfiel forehead at Subaru's interruption when his eyes widened as he heard the exact words he was about to say.

As if taken completely off guard, Garfiel's cutting impression fell away to an almost childish air. It was almost strange. Immediately shaking his head at the squinting Subaru, Garfiel clicked his fangs as if to compose himself.

Garfiel: "That's creepy as fuck, but if y'already know, that'd speed things up. Don't try hidin' anythin', honest now. Y'don't want me t'hurt ya, do ya."

Subaru: "Right. But I'm a busy guy, there're loads of things I want to check as well— If I answer your questions... in exchange, will you answer some of mine?"

Garfiel: "Y'think yer in any position t'negotiate? I'm in a position t'eat y'whole, and yer in th'position t'keep tossin' meat t'stave off gettin' eaten. «Meegee gives up th'big bro before the lil' bro», as they say."

Subaru: "Of all the references you made... that might be the darkest one, you know."

Replying with a shrug, Subaru dropped his gaze and fell into silence.

Garfiel looked like he was growing impatient, but he didn't pressure Subaru to hurry. While Subaru took a deep breath and decided how best to answer.

Subaru: "Inside, I took the Trials. I saw my past."

Garfiel: “—! So y’did have th’qualifications... Tch. Then, yer result’s...”

Subaru: “Failed. It’s not so easy, accepting or denying your past... It’s the same with Emilia, I’m afraid.”

Giving him half a truth and half a lie, Subaru tried to gauge Garfiel’s response.

Garfiel’s face paled when he heard that Subaru had taken the Trials, but once learned that Subaru didn’t pass, his shoulders slumped in relief.

Subaru: “Well you sure look pretty damn pleased about it.”

Garfiel: “What d’y...?”

Subaru: “I was just thinking, you certainly look pretty happy to hear that Emilia failed, and the Sanctuary won’t be liberated.”

Listening to Subaru’s words, Garfiel furrowed his brows and snorted as if starting to catch on. Slightly lowering his stance, he glared up at Subaru.

Garfiel: “Y’bastard, what’n yer past... ‘n yer Trials, what th’hell did y’hear?”

Subaru: “About the creation of the Sanctuary, and some background stuff as well. Also, about you and Ryuzu-san, I guess.”

Garfiel: “—! Y’know... about, my...”

“Past?”, Garfiel was about to say, when Subaru cut him off with a shake of his head.

Subaru: “Not sure what you saw in your past, but I don’t know nearly that much. Although, I do have an idea why you’re keeping quiet about having taken the Trials.”

Garfiel: “...Y’already know that much...”

Subaru: “Part of it’s speculation, too. You can reply with an outraged «you’re just imagining it!», if you want.”

In this world, Subaru and Garfiel have only known each other for a single day.

Most of the information he had gathered from his interactions with Garfiel were things he wasn't supposed to have heard yet. The same goes for information about the original Ryuzu Meyer, sleeping in the Experimental Grounds.

Thus, Subaru was trying bypass this by conveniently making use of the Trials and Echidna's existence. For now, he figured that there was nothing else he could gain from this interaction with Garfiel.

So he really just wanted this conversation to be over. But—

Subaru: “—Say, why won't you retake the Trials?”

Garfiel: “———”

In front of the silent Garfiel, Subaru asked him this question.

Hearing this, Garfiel lowered his head so as not to let Subaru see his expression.

His arms dangled at his sides, as his wary posture slackened and lost its strength.

From that, Subaru judged that no sudden attack was coming.

Subaru: “You know, I can't help but feel that your actions lack consistency. First you push Emilia to liberate the Sanctuary, and then you look all relieved when she fails. But then again, if you're really trying to block the Sanctuary from being liberated, you're going about it way too half-heartedly.”

If he completely disregarded the consequences, Garfiel could just transform into a beast and kill Subaru and Emilia.

Naturally, his relationship with the refugees and Roswaal's faction would plummet, but if Garfiel's goal was truly to hinder the Sanctuary's liberation, then this method would be both quick and reliable.

And yet, Garfiel didn't take any actions up until the very last moment—until Subaru crossed the line by having the refugees escape the Sanctuary.

—There was still some threshold inside Garfiel's mind that Subaru didn't know of.

Subaru: “I was hoping I could get your help.”

Garfiel: “—Don’t say such stupid crap.”

Hearing Subaru say this, Garfiel paused a moment before turning him down.

Looking up and shaking his head, Garfiel’s usual vigor was completely gone from his face.

Garfiel: “Like y’said, our interests ain’t aligned. I won’t actively get in yer way, but I ain’t gonna help ya, either. Neutral. Yeah, neutral’s good.”

Subaru: “You do realize that position doesn’t suit you at all?”

Garfiel: “It ain’t a matter of suitin’ or not. I’m just doin’ it ‘cus it’s what I have t’do.”

Annoyed at saying something he wouldn’t usually say, Garfiel kicked at the ground, sweeping up a cloud of dust as he turned his back to Subaru.

Garfiel: “If that half-devil beats th’Trials, that’s fine by me. Once yer here, the only way yer gettin out is by passin’ the Trials. I’m aware of that— But whether I’m leavin’ the Sanctuary once it’s freed ‘s another matter.”

Subaru: “...”

Garfiel: “If yer gonna leave, go ahead’n get out. But don’t try anythin’ in here. Don’t meddle in our shit any more’n y’already have. Y’stay by that, and I ain’t gonna do anythin’.”

Subaru: “Even if I told you that we need your help outside?”

Garfiel: “...Th’things that I want, none of y’lot can give me. This’s as far as this conversation goes. Don’t try pullin’ any unnecessary stunts now.”

Though he refused to listen to Subaru, Garfiel left him with those still-rational words.

Garfiel had shown his strong rejection in all their conversations up to now, but only this time, he didn’t lose his composure.

Just what was different, and what could it mean?

Subaru: “There’s a mountain of things I have to think about... But.”

Inserting his fingers into his black hair, Subaru set aside his over-complicated considerations for now.

As much as he wanted to sort them, organize them, and arrange them to arrive at some kind of answer,

Subaru: “There’s no way I could sort out all these things alone.”

Should he get lost inside his labyrinth of thoughts, Natsuki Subaru would only be caught in another downward spiral. To make sure that doesn’t happen, what he needed to do now was,

Subaru: “Guess it’s time to rely on you again...”

Subaru’s thoughts turned to the only person in the world to whom he could lay bare his worries.

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As if spurred on by some unbearable emotion, Subaru’s steps hastened.

After parting with Garfiel, Subaru’s walk turned into a run.

With ragged breaths, sweating brows, and trembling eyes, Subaru sprinted.

His sole destination, lit by the moonlight, was the interior of the Tomb.

This was after their previous conversation.

Having stated that he would not interfere with Subaru’s actions, Garfiel did not stop him. There was no one left to rebuke him for venturing into the Tomb once more.

Arriving at the entryway, Subaru stopped to roughly wipe off the sweat with his sleeves. Drawing deep breaths to calm his winded lungs, Subaru pressed forward into the darkness of the Tomb.

Since there was something he must do— in the abyssal Citadel of Dreams that was Echidna’s realm.

Subaru: “If you truly wish inside your heart... «I want to know».”

Then you will be invited. That was what the white-haired Witch had told him.

Clinging to that hope and putting his faith in those words, Subaru came here.

There was a mountain of things he wanted to ask, to talk about, to agonize over, and to search for the answer together with her.

Things he could only reveal to the Witch of Greed, so that she might show him the way. What he needed to do, and what he wanted to do were now one and the same. All that was left was some way to make it reality, some way other than deliberating alone.

Subaru: “———”

It was not that he didn't feel ashamed about going to Echidna's Citadel, dumping all his doubts and worries on her, and imposing on her good will.

And it was not that he wasn't afraid that revealing everything to Echidna would violate the forbidden and once again drown the Sanctuary in Envy's shadows.

Yet, even so, Subaru had hope. Hope that the Witch's guidance might be the key to breaking through fate's dead-end.

Subaru: “Right now... I should meet all the requirements.”

He was so lost as to what to do. And so ruled that any means necessary shall be used. If the present Subaru wasn't a willing and eager Apostle of Greed, then what was he?

Innumerable times would he freely surrender his life. And he would give up his pride too, if that was all it took to settle this.

For that was all this pathetic, useless, and ignorant Natsuki Subaru could manage.

Subaru: “I'm counting on you, Echidna...!”

Subaru steadied his breaths, and silently gathered the courage to step into the Tomb.

Making his way to the rectangular space that had already accepted him as a challenger once tonight, he scanned over the room, and proceeded towards its center.

Subaru: “Gonna have to wing it with where and what rituals’re required, but...”

The second time Subaru was invited into the dream, aside from the desperate desire for an answer, he should have been in the same position as he was immediately after Returning by Death. There didn’t seem to be any special offering required.

In any case, Subaru kneeled on the spot, joined his hands, and closed his eyes. He envisioned the White Witch in his mind, calling out to her with the enumerations of his emotions, as if telling of his impossible future and his despairing desire to reach her.

Subaru: “———”

Just like this, time passed as Subaru waited in silence.

He could feel the Tomb’s cold air caressing his skin as cold sweat formed on his brows.

He wanted it. Desperately.

He yearned for it. Earnestly.

If he wanted it this badly, yearned for it this badly, and still couldn’t reach her——

——Then perhaps Greed is far too immense an avarice for mere humans.

Subaru: “——Uh?”

Just before this faintheartedness could sink in, Subaru felt the illusion of a white light encroaching on the darkness behind his eyelids—— Or perhaps, it was no illusion.

Subaru: “———”

White light invaded his vision, slowly, and slowly, eroding away the pitch-dark world.

Before he knew it, his kneeling body had fallen to its side, and he could feel his consciousness detach from reality as it was pulled into another world.

——His summon to the Citadel of Dreams had begun.

In the Citadel where Echidna was waiting, this time, he was determined to hold the conversation that would let him truly grasp the future.

That thought alone occupied his fading consciousness, as—

???: “—*Witness, a present that was not to be.*”

The moment his awareness fell away, he thought he heard that voice.

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A sensation like a drunken stupor swayed Subaru’s nerves.

He didn’t know what happened. His awakening came so suddenly that it was like when a channel was switched on a television. As if having jumped to a channel of a completely different genre, it felt like his entire consciousness was replaced.

It was almost reminiscent of the sensation immediately following Return by Death.

The discrepancy between the wretchedness of the world where he died, and the one after Returning by Death always carved a sense of incongruity into his mind, body, and soul.

Subaru: “———”

When he tried to speak, Subaru realized that he couldn’t make a sound. He tried bringing a hand to his throat, but only then, he belatedly noticed that he could feel neither his hand nor his throat.

Subaru: “———?”

Whether it was his limbs, his eyes, or his mouth, none of his body existed. There was only his consciousness, floating in space, watching the world from above as nothing more than a point of view. It was unnatural, like the disembodied sensation of being inside a dream.

But he had a feeling that this wasn’t the first time he felt this way. Could he be dreaming, after all?

With those thoughts in the back of his mind, Natsuki Subaru tried to tear his consciousness away from the scene before his eyes.

But it was impossible.

For the disembodied Subaru, not only turning his head away, even closing his eyes was forbidden.

All he could do was watch— as this scene before his eyes was forcibly burned into his mind.

???: “—iar.”

The voice was quiet, and hoarse. And so weak that he could barely make out what it was saying. But,

Subaru: “———”

He intuitively understood it.

With nothing but his consciousness, Subaru intuitively understood “this is bad”. It was a voice that he mustn’t hear.

A voice he mustn’t recognize.

Proclaiming something he mustn’t know.

But, regardless of what his consciousness told him, the scene searing into his mind did not change. It would not disappear. But only went on pushing, carving this outcome into Subaru.

???: “Liar... Liar, liar liar liar liar liar... Hk.”

Within that repeating whisper, the previously inaudible word began to take shape, as if forgetting to stop, and interspersed with sobs.

A heartrending sight. His ears were filled with despairing grief. To take this into his eyes and to receive this into his ears must have been the greatest suffering in this world.

Subaru: “———”

Why was he here?

Why was he seeing this?

His failure. His mistake. His error in judgment. He wasn't supposed to see these. He wasn't supposed to know these. He was never supposed to know these.

—If I didn't tell myself, "It won't be like that", I...

Emilia: "Liar... liar! Subaru... you liar! You liar—!!"

Collapsed on the floor, with a flood of tears pouring from her amethyst eyes, Emilia cried out. Like an accusation of a betrayal, rejecting the nightmare before her eyes, disheveling her hair like a small child, Emilia screamed as if in a frenzy.

—While, at the sleeping Rem's bedside, Subaru's corpse with a small knife pierced into his throat lay in front of the wailing Emilia.

Arc 4 Chapter 70 - What Comes After Hell

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 12, Chapter 5 “Ending List”, Parts 5-6

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

—What on earth was he watching?

Subaru: “———”

Expelling ear-splitting shrieks, Emilia was crying Subaru’s name.

Subaru’s body was leaning limply against the bed, its wide-open eyes devoid of life.

Well, naturally. With its throat pierced by a dagger, and with that much lost blood, it couldn’t possibly be alive.

It’s not every day that you’d get a chance to look down at your own corpse. It was a twisted sensation, as if he had detached from his dead body as a ghost and was being made to watch the spectacle that followed.

Even if the majority of that feeling was false, the fundamental part was not.

—What Subaru was being forced to watch was unmistakably the scene after his death.

Subaru: “———”

The room’s furnishings, the people present here, and the wretched figure of his dead self.

Putting these together, Subaru realized precisely what he was being shown here.

It was the result of his thoughtless act after the subjugation of the Sin Archbishop, Petelgeuse Romanée-Conti, and saving Emilia, when he first learned of the loss of Rem.

Having felled the White Whale, repelled Sloth, and saved Emilia and the Arlam Villagers, Subaru was at the height of joy when he was sent plummeting to the pit of the abyss upon learning that Rem was lost.

He had raced the carriage all the way to the Capital— where he found the sleeping Rem in Crusch Karsten's mansion, and, once he confirmed that her consciousness was gone and no one could remember her, Subaru immediately committed suicide by stabbing a knife through his own throat.

It was almost a reflex, without a single moment of deeper consideration.

He had merely done it to reject the scene before his eyes, to ask Return by Death for a chance to retry the past and retrieve what had been lost.

—But this rash deed came to no success, and the place he returned to after his suicide was immediately before he stabbed his neck, after already having reunited with the sleeping Rem.

Return by Death's savepoint had been updated.

Its merciless timing had stolen away Subaru's only means of retrieving Rem, and once again plunged him into the depths of the abyss.

It was after that, when he sealed his resolve and made his oath to restore her and to somehow keep standing up to now, but—

Subaru: "It's not... my fault... This... it's not my fault. I didn't know... I've never seen any of this."

He had never seen this scene before.

Well, of course. Subaru was already dead in this world.

Though he had the means to return after losing his life, he never knew what happened to those worlds after he died. Or rather, there was no way for him to know.

But still, it was not until this moment that he had even considered it.

Experiencing his own death, rewinding the world, then proceeding along a different path to bypass the dead-end, the world in which he died gave him no information beyond how he died, and served as nothing more than a transit point.

Judging these worlds to be mere checkpoints towards his ultimate, desired future, and having decided to make full use of Return by Death, he had regarded even this present world as no more than a waypoint.

But now— That was crumbling.

Subaru: “Stop. Stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop it please stop!”

Rejecting the scene before his eyes, Subaru shrieked a voiceless shriek. But, without a throat to raise a sound, no eyes to avert his gaze, and no ears he could cover, the world went on engraving its outcome into Subaru’s consciousness.

—As punishment for the careless deed he committed.

???: “Emilia-sama, what—!”

Overhearing Emilia’s wails, a new character stepped into the horrendous scene.

Wearing a brand-new butler’s outfit over his muscular body, his stride giving no indication of this old man’s injuries— Wilhelm.

Skidding into the room, the old man unwittingly fell silent at the sight before him.

—So even the Sword Demon Wilhelm could make such a dumbfounded face.

Subaru was hit with that out-of-place thought as he saw Wilhelm’s face head-on. That was just how far Wilhelm’s expression deviated from the usual, unable to hide his shock at the sight of Subaru’s corpse.

Wilhelm: “What in the world has... No, now’s not... Subaru-dono!”

But Wilhelm’s bewilderment only lasted an instant.

Shaking his head to promptly suppress his bafflement, he rushed to the collapsed Subaru’s side. Emilia continued clinging to the lifeless body, oblivious to Wilhelm’s approach.

Emilia: “Subaru... Subaru you... liar... You said th... we’d be together...”

Wilhelm: “Emilia-sama, I beg your forgiveness—!”

While Emilia condemned Subaru's betrayal like a curse, Wilhelm pushed her aside to reach the corpse. Without any strength to support her own body, she fell to the floor, but Wilhelm immediately turned from his momentary attention towards Emilia back to resuscitating Subaru, who was still soaking in the fresh, profuse pool of his own blood.

Wilhelm: "-----"

His expression grave, Wilhelm took off his jacket and used it to cover Subaru's throat as he unhesitatingly drew out the dagger. Blood sprayed out, staining Wilhelm's perilous visage, but without even blinking, he immediately plugged the wound.

The bleeding stopped, while Wilhelm pumped on Subaru's still chest, attempting to revive his heart.

Wilhelm: "Ferris! Felix! Come quickly!! Emergency! HURRY!!"

Aiming his shout outside the room, Wilhelm applied pressure to Subaru's wound as he continued the resuscitation effort. However, the volume of lost blood was far too great. His limbs and face were drained of color, and anyone could see that Natsuki Subaru's soul was no longer present.

But still, Wilhelm had no intention to give up.

Ferris: "Old Wil', what're you yelling ab— hk!"

Wilhelm: "Felix, quickly! The blade's punctured his throat! There's not a second to lose!"

Ferris: "-----!"

Rushing up at the call, Ferris immediately nodded at Wilhelm's command, cloaking his hands in a blue, undulating aura as he sent healing magic into Subaru's fallen body. Gazing down on his own soul-departed corpse, Subaru saw a seriousness on Ferris' always easy-going face that he had never seen before.

Subaru: "That's... enough... It's useless. It won't work. You can't save him anymore..."

Anything they do would be pointless now.

In Subaru's memories, there was nothing about being saved after this attempted suicide.

Natsuki Subaru had impulsively plunged a knife into his own throat in rejection of reality, leaving irreparable wounds in the hearts of those around him, while he himself disappeared without feeling the slightest pang on his conscience.

Those were the facts. Those two's desperate efforts would come to nothing.

Wilhelm: "You mustn't die! I absolutely won't let you die! If I lost my benefactor in this way, I could not live with the shame...!"

Ferris: "Why did he have to pull this stupid stunt now... Tch."

Wilhelm shouted, pressing on the wound, and Ferris muttered this agitated complaint while casting the gentlest magic in this world. This scene, and the ripples of their emotions, went on striking at Subaru's heart. But despite their hopeless efforts—

Ferris: "——"

Wilhelm: "Felix! Why!? Why have you stopped healing!? If this goes on..."

Ferris: "It's over, old Wil'— His soul isn't here anymore."

Wilhelm closed in, but Ferris pushed him away. Removing the Sword Demon's jacket, he took a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped off Subaru's wound. The gash had been perfectly closed, and it was impossible to tell that it had been a fatal injury. Subaru's body had been restored to the same state as several minutes ago.

Except, neither the volumes of spilt blood nor his departed soul remained.

Looking down at Subaru's pale, lifeless face with the wound wiped away, Wilhelm shook his head,

Wilhelm: "Why... Why did you do this! Why would you... so easily... Subaru-dono, you were...!"

His fist struck the floor with the sound of a hard crack. Blood mixed into the fractured floorboard as Wilhelm's fist was cut along with it. His knuckles dripping with blood, Wilhelm bit into his lips as if enduring unbearable regret.

Directly opposite the clearly emotional Wilhelm, Ferris only looked down at Subaru with a pained expression. His cat-ears drooped as he gazed at Subaru's unpeaceful expression,

Ferris: "...Weakling, coward. You just abandoned everyone important to you... Pushed all the pain and all the suffering onto everyone else... Are you satisfied nyow?"

It was too severe to be mocking, and too kind to be a condemnation. The complexities of the emotions hidden in Ferris' voice was too far beyond what Subaru's frozen thoughts could comprehend.

But it was clear from Wilhelm and Ferris' reactions,

—That Subaru had done something irreversible to them both.

Emilia: "——"

His thoughts completely stopped.

What was he seeing right now?

He knew. He already knew what he was being made to see. He was being forced to bear witness to his own sins.

Wilhelm: "—Emilia-sama?"

Wilhelm suddenly called her name.

The astonishment in his voice was because Emilia had suddenly stopped crying, and her collapsed body was no longer trembling.

Noticing this change, a touch of pain scraped across Wilhelm's expression. The loss he had just tasted, how much more strongly must it have struck Emilia? This expression was simply because he realized this.

The old man firmly closed his eyes, and stood up.

Then, he walked over to the fallen Emilia, and extended his hand to help her up.

Wilhelm: "I must apologize for my actions, Emilia-sama. But it would be harmful to your health to remain like this. Please, take care to..."

Emilia: “—He told me.”

Wilhelm: “Emilia-sama?”

Emilia: “Even though he told me he loved me...!”

Lying sideways on the floor, hugging her knees, Emilia curled into a ball and screamed.

“You’re behaving like a child”, was not a reprimand anyone present could voice. Wilhelm furrowed his brows as if enduring his pain, and even Ferris turned away, unable to bear watching Emilia’s grief. When,

Ferris: “—Eh?”

Baffled, Ferris’s eyes and mouth opened wide as a dumb noise escaped his throat.

As if guided by that voice, Wilhelm followed Ferris’ gaze, and was stunned.

Wilhelm: “———”

—Before their eyes, Subaru’s apparently perished body sat up.

Subaru: “———!?”

This spectacle transcending comprehension shocks even Subaru’s consciousness.

His revived flesh stretches out its limbs with the choppy movement of a mechanical doll, standing up with its head still bent ninety-degrees sideways, eyes slowly opening. Its unfocused gaze, its pupils bereft of light, leer over the room.

Wilhelm: “Ferri...”

Ferris: “Impossible! His body was certainly dead! The resuscitation failed!”

Wilhelm called to Ferris as if clinging to the last strand of hope, but Ferris cut him off, shouting back his thoughts.

Hearing this, Wilhelm immediately decided on his next action. That is—

Wilhelm: “Subaru-dono, forgive me—!”

Even the lack of a sword caused no detriment to the Sword Demon’s skill.

Wilhelm crouched down to pick up the jacket that was discarded on the floor, twisting it up along with Subaru’s blood, and used his entire body to lunge it forward like a lance.

Riding on its speed and the added weight of the blood, its tip pierced through the air as a spear of cloth. With what might be called the Cloth-Spear Technique, Wilhelm preemptively struck at the rising Subaru.

His aim was true, and the point of his jacket seemed about to pierce straight into Subaru’s face—

Wilhelm: “—Hn!”

—When a cascade of shadows surged up from Subaru’s feet and swallowed the pointed cloth whole, nullifying Wilhelm’s attack.

Sighting the shadow that appeared without warning, Wilhelm instantly drew back his arm— but could not completely avoid the damage. Three fingers on his right hand were severed at the joints, taken along with the jacket.

Flying backwards, dripping with blood, Wilhelm clicked his tongue as he kept his distance from the now standing Subaru.

Wilhelm: “Felix! Take Emilia-sama away from here, now! I will try to delay it!”

Ferris: “Don’t even have a sword... all I’ve got is a dyagger!”

Tumbling into a corner of the room, Ferris tossed the dagger at his hips to Wilhelm. Catching it in his left hand, Wilhelm drew it from its sheath with a turn of his wrist and muttered “Feels off with short weapons”,

Wilhelm: “Get out of the mansion, follow Crusch-sama’s instructions—No, that won’t work now. Felix, use your own judgement. Bring the Knights here.”

Felix: “Won’t it be a bit hard on your own, old Wil’?”

Wilhelm: “It’s something on the level of the White Whale, or potentially... What in the world has been living inside Subaru-dono...”

Measuring his opponent’s strength, Wilhelm held his breath as beads of sweat emerged on his skin.

In front of the wary Sword Demon, Subaru’s arms remained dangling at his sides as his gaze swept aimlessly to-and-fro’ while his upper body swayed side-to-side. It was without rational thought. And perhaps, it wasn’t even conscious.

The question was that despite being in this state, did it have enough awareness to defend itself?

Warily, Wilhelm went on glaring at the transformed Subaru.

Meanwhile, watching all of this, Subaru’s consciousness was caught in a storm of question marks.

The situation had clearly changed from what it was before. Being forced to witness his sin while his heart was torn and shattered, Subaru was now watching the absurd progression of the world after his death.

What the hell was this supposed to be? Could it have really happened? If not, then what was it supposed to mean? Why was his consciousness here, now?

He couldn’t understand any of it. None of it made any sense at all, but—

Wilhelm: “Felix! Take Emilia-sama—!”

Ferris: “I got it already! Emilia-sama, come with...!?”

Answering Wilhelm’s urgings for him hurry, Ferris crossed the room and roughly pulled up the fallen Emilia. But a quake instantly rocked Ferris’ expression. The reason, was,

???: “—You dare make Lia cry.”

Birthing a white haze, a small figure descended on the center of the room.

With grey fur, and a tail as long as its body, of such a size it could fit in one’s hand, the pressure it exerted could easily make one mistake it for some great, ferocious beast. Making his long-overdue

appearance, the tiny Great Spirit floated in the center of the room, gazing down on Subaru. On his expression was unfathomable severity, and his words were rife with contempt.

Puck: “Factoring the barbarism of that body’s owner alongside, you’re deserving of ten-thousand deaths. You damned witch.”

The narrow room was flooded with cold, murderous intent. Exhaling white breaths, Wilhelm’s face stiffened as he watched Puck turn that intent into icy spearheads.

Wilhelm: “Spirit... Emilia-sama couldn’t have possibly...”

Puck: “Lia is unconscious right now. In accordance with the Contract, I will act on my own judgment. The Witch shall not be forgiven. I shall protect Lia— As for the one who made Lia cry, I shall not forgive this man.”

Wilhelm: “Wait! Fighting here now will only—”

Puck: “Violated your Oath, and my Lia’s heart is frozen— It’s due time that I end you.”

Ignoring Wilhelm’s protests, Puck’s cold intent was steadily rising. White mist filled the room, all was starting to freeze, marking the beginning of the death of all things. In a world where even breaths would be frozen, Puck’s hostility was directed at Subaru alone.

That Subaru’s head tilted upwards, looking at Puck for the first time. Its void, blank eyes gazed at the floating Puck, when suddenly, its eyelids twitched. Then,

Puck: “———”

It snickered.

Subaru’s corpse twisted its face and snickered at the sight of Puck. Full of malice, contorted beyond recognition, a mocking grin.

Subaru: “———Sto...”

Watching this unfold, Subaru’s consciousness called for it stop before the destined catastrophe.

But his call reached nothing.

Sweeping his little paw down from above, Puck births a small-scale glacier inside the room, its absolute zero threatening to consume Subaru's corpse. Shadows burst up from below to beat the ice back, the torrent of mana throwing the small room into disarray, catching Wilhelm and even Ferris in the whirling nexus— And it explodes. Shrieks and wails, freezing ice, cracking and crumbling, all peel out as white demise and black despair intermingle to shroud out everything.

Subaru: “———!!”

Abruptly, like the power had been cut, the world lost all color.

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Subaru: “———Pffu.”

The pain of his face smashing into the ground prompted Subaru's consciousness to wake. His jaw crashing against the damp floor, Subaru's eyes teared up at the stinging pain as he shook his head. And, immediately lifting his face, he quickly scanned over his surroundings— Nothing was off.

Subaru: “I—I'm... inside the Tomb...”

Cold air and dark space, the dampness of the floor and the scent of mold and decay— He was definitely inside the Tomb. Having confirmed this, Subaru opened and closed his hands to check that there was nothing wrong with his limbs. His ragged breathing began to settle, as he exhaled a deep breath from his lungs to force himself to calm.

But the tremors of his very organs refused to be chased away.

Subaru: “A daydream... that'd be too much of a coincidence. But, otherwise...”

What the hell was that?

After being forced to witness that spectacle, Subaru began to assess the situation he had been placed in.

First of all, without a doubt, that was a scene after Subaru's death.

Emilia's shrieks at the sight of Subaru's corpse, Wilhelm and Ferris' desperate attempts to save him—and the final, nightmarish clash at the end.

The first part carved scarring gashes into his heart, while the second part plunged his soul into incomprehensible, uncontrollable bewilderment.

Subaru: "Uuh, guh—"

The moment he remembered it, Subaru bent over, holding the wrenching pain in his waist while the expelled contents of his stomach splashed onto the floor. It would be called vomit, but he hadn't really eaten dinner. All that came out was yellow bile and some tea he had drunk an hour earlier.

He could only repeat this vomiting motion to constrict his stomach in answer to his body's demands.

It was while repeating this, over and over, that Subaru began to realize the circumstances of his situation.

Inside the Tomb, if he was not summoned to Echidna's Dream Citadel, then there was only one other place his detached consciousness could have been taken.

Subaru: "Unless... that was a Trial...? Not the past... but the second one...!?"

No longer the First Trial, where he had to face his past, the Second Trial had begun.

Noticing this possibility, Subaru stood there, stupefied.

Indeed, to Subaru, it had been several days since he passed the First Trial. But that only applied to his soul, while for this body and for this world, it had only been several hours. In other words, he shouldn't have met the requirements for the next stage of the Trials.

If the Trials had started regardless, then it could only be an irregularity. And more importantly, according to Echidna,

Subaru: "She said it wouldn't be as painful as the Trials to face my past..."

—If what Subaru saw really was a part of the Trials, then even in scratching the surface, he already felt like he was facing the worst possible continuation.

That scene was, for Subaru, what came after hell.

Subaru had witnessed hell numerous times. He was aware of that.

And if it were for the sake of obtaining the optimum future, Subaru had prepared himself to see hell many times again.

—But, preparation to go even deeper than hell, to learn of an even worse realm?

???: *“Witness, a present that was not to be.”*

Subaru: “———Wh!?”

In the face of that terrifying experience, at a loss as to stay or to retreat, Subaru heard a whisper scraping across his ear.

Just as his body tensed from the shock— the sensation of his consciousness slipping once again came visiting.

Bracing the fall with his arms, but unable to support himself, he collapsed shoulder-first onto the floor. He tried lifting his face in an effort to stay conscious, but neither his eyelids nor his neck could resist that invisible force as he was instantly dragged into the depths of the abyss.

—The Trial, the deepest pit of hell, once again welcomed Subaru.

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Subaru: “———”

When he opened his eyes, Subaru found himself on a field of grass, at the scene where Julius’ sword had cut open his throat— as he was forced to bear witness to his sins once more.

Arc 4 Chapter 71 - Ending List

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 12, Chapter 5 “Ending List”, Parts 7-19

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

From the slit where the blade entered his skin, shallow and sharp, life was leaking out.

Fresh, gushing blood dotted the green grass, while Subaru’s body reflexively convulsed under the watching, purple-haired youth.

Turning up the whites of his eyes, foaming at the mouth, mass volumes of blood spouted from his mouth and neck. Gradually, the intensity of the bleeding waned, until, hearing a sound like a sigh,

Subaru: “———”

Subaru clearly understood that his past self had died.

It wasn’t because his present and past selves shared the same senses. But still, the vivid sensation of his neck being sliced open resounded without end within Subaru’s disembodied consciousness— and soul.

Julius: “Emilia-sama, if you would wipe his... Subaru’s face clean...”

Emilia: “———”

Julius: “He would have wanted you, rather than me, to do this. To have it be your hands.”

Wiping off his bloodied Knight’s sword and returning it to its scabbard, Julius muttered to the stupefied Emilia.

At the feet of the fallen Subaru, lying face-up on the ground, the silver-haired girl fell hard onto her knees. Her amethyst eyes were devoid of emotion, refusing to accept reality. Nor did she wipe away the tear trails on her cheeks, glistening in the light.

Seeing Emilia like this sent sharp pain gouging into Subaru's non-existent chest. Her grieving expression brought out the punishment Subaru had refused to see, made it bare its fangs, and scoured away the callous approach he had taken up to now.

Emilia: "Suba... ru."

Her hand slowly crept onto his face, wiping off the blood and spewed contents with her palm. Barehanded, she did not mind the filth as she did her best to turn Subaru's expression that was twisted in agony into something presentable. And once she finished wiping off the blood,

Emilia: "Why...? Why, Subaru... why did you..."

A question. Emilia asked this empty question to someone who could never respond.

He had neither ears to listen, nor a mouth to answer. Nothing Emilia could say would ever reach the lifeless Subaru again.

Subaru: "-----"

Watching this from above, Subaru searched his memories for the context of this new scene.

—It was the second time he battled Petelgeuse, when, unable to resist possession, Subaru's body was destroyed along with that madman.¹³³

Ferris' magic had sent his body's Mana into a frenzy, overloading his vessels and organs, so his death couldn't have been called pretty. Blistering rashes covered his exposed skin, and broken blood vessels had dyed his half-open eyes red. Before being wiped away, the blood from his nose had painted the lower half of his face, and if it weren't for Julius' timely coup-de-grace, his death would have been even more grotesque.

But no matter how neat his death might've been, it would've been no consolation for the ones who remained. Especially to those who survived the battle against the White Whale and the final showdown

¹³³ In the Web Novel, the fight against Petelgeuse took three tries total. The first loop was merged with the second, in the Light Novel and Anime, and the way he died on the second Web Novel loop was used in the Light Novel - assisted suicide.

with Sloth, about to set off on their triumphant return to the Capital— The dejection and regret on all their faces wrenched at his heart.

Wilhelm: “Subaru-dono... I must beg your forgiveness...”

Dropping to his knees, Wilhelm lowered his head in front of the lifeless Subaru.

Having slain all the Witch Cultists under Petelgeuse’s command, Wilhelm’s expression took on a bitter taste at the outcome of their battle. Of the old knights of the expedition, some joined in their lamentations with Wilhelm’s, while others punched their fists into the ground. There were even some who teared up from their emotions.

Subaru fell speechless to see his death so mourned.

That was perhaps even more overwhelming than being shown the events after his own death.

Emilia: “Why... would you go to such lengths to help me...? Say, Subaru... why did you?”

Setting her hand on the silent Subaru’s cheeks, Emilia went on calling with words that would not reach him.

Witnessing her grief, it was only now, that Subaru realized— In this world, Subaru had never answered Emilia’s question.

He had never given her his honest answer to the question she asked in the Capital, “Why do you want to help me?”. And so, Emilia still didn’t know the reason behind Subaru’s selfless devotion.

—Though decisively different from the scene he was shown before, both were the results of his irrevocable sins.

Julius: “The world has long suffered from the Witch Cult, and we have slain its vanguard, Sloth. To the world, this is a momentous accomplishment— However.”

Looking down at Subaru’s corpse, Julius tapped his finger on the hilt of his sheathed sword. Over and over, as the intervals between the taps gradually shortened,

Julius: “That does not mean I can accept every sacrifice made to achieve this— I had wished to speak more with you, Natsuki Subaru.

With that pained mutter, Julius turned away from Subaru’s lifeless face.

The knight looked up to the sky, his eyes harboring a melancholy gloom,

Julius: “I would have liked to call you a friend.”

By the sound of Julius’ exhausted whisper, this grass-field world was brought to an end.

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Again, all fell to black, as the returning Subaru woke with a jolt.

Subaru: “—Dgh, hwa...! Ah, aaah, hah, AAAAAAAH!?”

He found himself writhing on the cold, hard floor.

The stench of moss invaded his nostrils as he rolled on the ground, immersed in that senseless act as if to escape from the emotions threatening to sweep up a storm inside him.

“What on earth is happening?”, was not the question on his mind.

He tumbles, tumbles, his inner-ear in pain, torturing his lungs as he wheezes shallow breaths, his consciousness wishing to reduce its allotment spent thinking by even a little, even a hair, to hopefully sink into unconsciousness.

Subaru: “—Ugh, guh!”

But even that demeaning attempt to distract himself failed the moment he bounced off a wall.

The collision drove pain into his spine, and he could feel blood seeping from his grazed forehead. Drawing gasp after gasp with his face against the floor, before he realized it, tears were streaming from his eyes.

—Pathetic. Stupid. Hopeless.

Just how many times, and to what extent, would Natsuki Subaru have to crumble under his own weakness?

And just what would he need to do to acquire that heart of steel that could remain unshaken no matter what transpired, and no matter what pain he would have to endure?

He was so weak, so brittle, and that was why Subaru had always—

Subaru: “Pretended not to see it, and averted my gaze... Is this my punishment...?”

There was no way he had never thought of it.

In some corner of Subaru’s consciousness, more than once, the possibility must have occurred to him.

But even so, the thought never rose to the surface, because he was subconsciously refusing to seek and verify the truth.

For Subaru, who could Return by Death, the moment he begins to consider the existence of worlds after his death— his entire strategy would crumble beneath his feet.

Everything Natsuki Subaru had hoped to save had left him behind.

Or rather, it was Natsuki Subaru who had left them behind. Pathetically and selfishly choosing to embrace death, Subaru had abandoned those worlds so he would escape to new ones. If the worlds left behind by Natsuki Subaru’s thoughtless decisions still existed, it would be exactly what he had just been shown.

Through death, Subaru had sought relief from hell, and those scenes were what followed.

Subaru: “—Can’t... be.”

Before he knew it, his consciousness began to grow distant once more. Unlike sleepiness, here, his consciousness was rapidly turning white as if forcibly being severed from reality.

???: *“Witness, a present that was not to be.”*

Again, the unrecognizable voice whispered in his ear.

“Whose voice was it?”, his fading consciousness was desperately asking— until he realized it.

—Without the slightest doubt, that voice was his own.

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In front of the corpse's shattered skull, a young girl was kneeling.

Having fallen from such heights, no human flesh could survive the impact without shattering. His black hair, along with the contents of his scalp, were splattered over the ground, blooming into a crimson flower of death.

Subaru: “———”

The sensation of his consciousness being switched wasn't surprising anymore. He had expected this the moment his awareness was forcibly cut.

But what he did not expect was the sight he would be presented with when his consciousness awoke——

???: “Spewing nonsense until the very end... when nothing... can...”

Fallen to his death, Subaru's body was sprawled out over the ground. Standing beside him, spitting this out, was a girl with peach-colored hair—— Ram.

Her usually impeccable grooming had been flustered, and visible rips and tears riddled the ends of her maid's uniform. On her face, which she had always consciously kept expressionless, was some unbearably complex and enraged emotion.

Rather than regret for Subaru's death—— it was closer to fury at this outcome.

Ram violently scratched her head and turned around.

Ram: “So, was this all according to your designs, Beatrice-sama? You stood in my path just so he could...”

Beatrice: “———”

Just as she was setting off her accusation, Ram's face stiffened as she stopped mid-sentence.

For reflected in her light-pink irises, was Beatrice, kneeling beside Subaru's corpse. Unworried about dirtying her dress, the girl just sat there on the ground— While Ram's gaze wavered, seeing her like this.

Ram: "Beatrice-sama..."

Beatrice: "—Why."

She softly murmured.

Paying no mind to Ram's existence, Beatrice single-mindedly kept her eyes on the dead Subaru. Tears were trailing from the corners of her blue eyes, even Subaru could see it.

—Beatrice was crying. At Subaru's death.

The fact plunged a knife of guilt into Subaru's heart.

Feeling the depths of his non-existent eyes heat up from the heart-gouging pain, he wanted to run up to that small, little girl, and say something, anything to her. Yet he lacked the legs, arms, and mouth to do so.

Beatrice: "You... aren't, That Person... I know that... at least... but..."

Her face devoid of expression, Beatrice whispered as if in a daze while the teardrops continued to fall.

Before that heart-rending figure, Ram gave up trying to say anything further. She exhaled a sigh, and turned her scornful eyes towards Subaru's corpse, and its neck, bent upwards at an outrageous angle,

Ram: "What nonsense... Love us— you're truly beyond saving."

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Subaru: "Witness, a present that was not to be."

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As if the very air was being frozen, a white, misty cold presided over the world.

The frozen forest broke apart at every gust of wind, and, unable to maintain its existence in this mana-starved environment, everything was returning to dust.

The trees, the streets, the creatures, and the world all fell to white, crystalline particles in the sweeping gale, as the earth was slowly consumed by white demise.

Subaru: “———”

This time, Subaru was witnessing the ending of the world. Mirroring the white void that was his consciousness, the world awaited its frigid and merciful end. Except,

???: “—So, you’ve come.”

The somber voice, quaking the atmosphere as it bellowed, was one of agreement.

Immediately, followed the deafening boom of earthshaking tremor as the impact of the behemoth’s fall reshaped the landscape. Trees snapped and toppled, shattering upon each other like icicles as the forest was wiped into flat, barren land.

The one that flattened the frozen forest was an enormous, four-legged, almost feline creature coated in grey fur.

Half the beast’s overflowing fangs were broken, while white mists escaped the gaps between its sword-like teeth. Collapsed onto its side, its radiant, golden irises turned to look at something in front of it.

And, with trembling, almost convulsing motions,

Beast: “A shame... I knew this would happen, but still there’s nothing I can change about it.”

???: “—I’ve more or less grasped what had transpired. Indeed, it is regrettable.”

The beast spoke, not to lament its defeat, but simply in knowing acceptance of the truth. And, it was a strikingly clear and elegant voice that replied.

In a world that was ending, that voice did not suffer the slightest loss of vitality or strength. Standing tall and straight, with red hair fluttering in the ivory wind, was a blue-eyed youth.

Youth: “Emilia-sama and Subaru are no longer in this world, I take it?”

Beast: “Lia is sleeping, eternally. Existing in a world without her carries no value at all. I who failed to protect her, and that man, share the same sin—”

Youth: “So for that reason, you would destroy the world?”

Beast: “I knew that I would be obstructed. But this is what I had pledged.”

Unsheathed from its dragon-talon-engraved scabbard, the glinting steel was pointed at the beast’s snout— at Puck, in his true form, while, wielding it, the Sword Saint Reinhard quietly shook his head.

Harbored within his sapphire eyes, was a deep, and compassionate sorrow.

Reinhard: “I understand your regret. And I feel the same. But that does not mean you may ruthlessly vent that regret upon this land. Your actions, and your Oath would bring chaos to this world— And I shall never permit it.”

Puck: “Because that would be unjust?”

Reinhard: “Yes, because that would be unjust— I am the model of Justice. The sword to rectify error. And thus, here I shall slay you. Great Spirit-sama.”

Despite their overwhelming disparity in mass, which side the balance of power favored was too plain to see.

Even Puck, in his true form, failing to ruffle Reinhard’s unfazed expression, was on his dying breaths. By simply drawing a silver arc with the point of his outstretched sword, Reinhard’s blade would carve the Spirit’s existence in two.

The ferocity of his surging swordcery communicated that fact clearly to the surroundings.

Puck: “—Kh.”

The sound led Reinhard to furrow his brows. Even Subaru's disembodied consciousness felt something akin to confusion in his scant emotions.

Brief and intermittent, it was difficult to make out what that sound may be.

Difficult, simply because it was so hard to believe that it was precisely what it sounded like.

Puck: "Kh, kheheh... Haha, hhahaha!"

Reinhard: "—What's so funny?"

With his throat trembling, and on the verge of death, Puck's face twisted as he burst into laughter.

Even with his life and death in another's hands, and having had his actions impeded, Puck was laughing. Unable to fathom his meaning, Reinhard asked this question.

But Puck only seemed to find his reaction even more hilarious.

Puck: "Is something funny? Incredibly funny, of course it's funny. Reinhard, do you... No, I mean, you cannot know anything.¹³⁴"

Reinhard: "..."

Puck: "I remember now. How it was meant to be. It took me long enough to understand it. And, having understood, when I saw how you still don't know, it's so funny I couldn't help myself."

There was something different about the tone and volume of that statement that was completely unlike Puck.

For Subaru, who had plenty of memories interacting with the cat-shaped spirit, this was the first time he had heard such spite in his words. This was different from his hatred towards Subaru and Petelgeuse after Emilia was killed. At that time, Puck was still Puck.

¹³⁴ Note by SummaryAnon: "During this line, Puck's form of addressing Reinhard changes from «kimi» (君), which is more respectful, to «omae» (お前), which is sometimes used as a derogatory term to address someone equal or inferior (assume all of Puck's uses of «you» from this point on are «omae»)".

This time, the laughter directed at Reinhard was nothing like what he had ever seen from Puck before, but something else entirely—

Reinhard: "...I will make sure that there are no more casualties. If you want someone to hate, then hate me."

Puck: "I don't resent you, Reinhard. You are a hero. Heroes have their roles, their deeds, that only heroes can do. I don't resent or fault you for following your creed."

Reinhard: "———"

Puck: "You are a hero, Reinhard— A hero is all you will ever be."

At the end of the end, he uttered the most spiteful remark of them all.

With the fall of the last syllable, Reinhard lifted his sword over his head, and in a single flash of his swordsmanship— from the glint of his blade's edge, an intense heat shot out.

It cleaves through the sky, drills through the air, shatters the ground, roils the ambient mana, rending everything which was in the blade's path in two— And, as the light settled, the world parted before Subaru's disembodied eyes.

Reinhard: "———"

At the close of the torrential sword slash, the world that was covered in the white, encompassing cold was born anew.

The parted world was mended, as the spiral of Mana faded into a ring, returning to the atmosphere. From the shattered earth, flowers budded and bloomed. The pierced-through air was imbued with warmth, as sunlight peered from the severed sky.

The strike of the Sword Saint simultaneously brought about the world's end as well as its rebirth.

—While the colossal beast that was rent by that strike vanished without a trace.

Indisputably present only moments ago, the enormous body was gone, and no indication of its destruction remained.

Subaru: “———”

With a shrill ring, Reinhard returned his Knight’s sword to its scabbard. The wind caressing the bangs of his red hair, Reinhard squinted his eyes as he looked up to the sky while spilling an all but inaudible sigh.

Reinhard: “——Felt-sama will surely be saddened.”

He whispered, closing his eyes.

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Subaru: “Witness, a present that was not to be.”

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Subaru: “Witness, a present that was not to be.”

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Subaru: “Witness, a present that—”

Arc 4 Intermission I - Tea Party

Has been cut from the Light Novel Adaptation

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#)

???: “Parallel universes, that’s one school of thought. It states that, separate from the universe we are living in now, many alternate universes following along a similar path exist.”

The person speaking was trying her best to suppress the waves of excitement in her voice. Accompanying that lecture-like statement, she was lightly tapping her fingers on the table in a pleasant and even rhythm.

???: “That sounds, huu... like it’s, haa... kind of complicated.”

???: “It’s not that hard to wrap your head around. Imagine infinite parallel worlds, each being generated by just one difference in choice. For example, say there is a split in the road on your way home. Both paths ultimately lead to your house, and there is a you who went right and a you who went left— That possibility would already constitute an extremely small-scale parallel universe.”

???: “What. So, you’re saying that there’re so many worlds out there that we can’t even count them? That’s just stupid.”

Hearing the response to the lethargic voice, a spirited voice butted in.

The lecturing speaker returned a wry smile, and raised a finger in front of her impatient companion,

???: “It isn’t anything so ridiculous. While yes, the breadth of that last example may’ve been too narrow and not communicated the scope of the difference very well... But you can definitely apply it to a grander scale as well.”

???: “Grander scale... like what?”

???: “Let’s see, right— Imagine if you had abandoned the isolated elven vanguard on the Boroid Plains, what would have happened then?”

???: “———”

???: “...Hmm. I was expecting you to be more infuriated by that.¹³⁵”

???: “It’s simple why I’m not angry. Even if you repeat that situation tens, hundreds, or thousands of times, I would’ve always chosen to throw my fists into the fray— So your parallel universe or whatever would never have come to be!”

With that intense assertion, the stubborn voice’s owner swings up their legs as they throw their feet down on the table, taking a reclining posture. The lecturer suppresses a laugh. Seeing their smile, the stubborn one’s pretty eyebrows pitch sharply down

???: “What’s so funny!?”

???: “No, I mean that was very manly of you, but your panties are showing, Minerva.”

Minerva: “Aa, kyaaaa! What, stupid! I can’t even believe this! Stupid! Stupid! Stupid! You’re so stupid! Just stupid! Stupid! You are so stupid! You’re stupid and, um, stupid!

Shouting curses that exposed the limits of her vocabulary, the blond-haired girl— the Witch of Wrath, Minerva, pulled her foot off the table with tears in her eyes, quickly closing her legs and holding down her skirt with her hands.

She looked up furiously at the white-haired Witch sitting opposite her. But,

???: “Haa. Leaving aside who’s right or wrong here, huu... your panties... haa... you kind of did that to yourself, Minerva, always so unladylike, huu... no point blaming anyone else for it... haa.”

Minerva: “Unladylike! Like you’re one to say that, Sekhmet. As if you ever wear anything other than that... Actually, when’s the last time you changed your robes?”

¹³⁵ Note by SummaryAnon: “Throughout this entire chapter, Echidna uses the pronoun «watashi» (わたし) instead of her usual «boku» (ボク).”

Minerva swiped her harsh glare onto the Witch of Sloth— Sekhmet, plopped on the table, completely buried in her long, magenta hair.

Under that sea of hair, a head moved and peeked out between the gaps, looking back at Minerva.

Sekhmet: “You just throw it over your head, huu... It’s the most convenient, haa... Typhon wipes my body for me, huu... So it’s not like I get filthy or anything, haa.”

Minerva: “You go criticizing other people’s behavior when you... Argh, arghh, arghhh... What do you want!? So I’m to blame? It’s all my fault? You want me to beat you clean here!?”

Minerva angrily waved her fist about, while Sekhmet turned her head away without saying a word. Seeing Sekhmet lose even the energy to speak, a blue vein popped up on Minerva’s forehead, but, as if having grown used to her temper, Sekhmet already completely lost interest.

Taking over for the spent Witch of Sloth, the first Witch— the Witch of Greed, Echidna, clapped her hands together and carried on the conversation,

Echidna: “I do understand your anger, but as much as I find it delightful, I would like to continue on our topic now.”

Minerva: “Hrrmph. You’re the one provoking me with all that parallel worlds rubbish, Echidna. I’m angry. I’m enraged. I’m furious...”

Echidna: “Right right. Now, on with parallel universes. If that last example didn’t stick... Let’s see. What do you think would have happened if Flugel never sealed the pact with Volcanica?”

Holding a finger to her lips, Echidna mischievously smiled as she raised this question to Minerva who, in turn, swallowed her breath and narrowed her blue eyes.

Minerva: “If Volcanica and Flugel never sealed their pact, Reid couldn’t have stopped her by himself... and the world would’ve been swallowed.”

Echidna: “If it had been swallowed, what then, I wonder. Of all the world, only the Witch of Envy would remain. Perhaps, a parallel universe in which this is the case even exists. And, if it does, won’t you find it incredibly interesting?”

Minerva: “Your eyes always get so gross whenever you talk about her, Echidna— I’m really not that mad at her. I just can’t share your wrath on that one.”

Echidna: “Well, that’s one way to approach it, I suppose— Your wrath is truly pleasant. That’s why you were the Witch most worthy of being loved.”

Echidna said in past tense, while Minerva looked away with a small snort and crossed her arms, emphasizing her abundant breasts with a jolt of her back.

Minerva: “I’m not looking to be loved. All I want is for conflict to be wiped from this world, for all the suffering, grief, and cries and wails of pain to be exterminated by my fists. I don’t need anything else on my path. My rage, my wrath, and my healing fists— are my everything.”

Minerva proclaimed her life’s purpose without a shadow of a doubt.

Without reserve or hesitation, it was conviction from which nothing could lead her astray.

Truly, this was wrath— directed at the world, an inexhaustible fury forming the roots of her existence from which all else was built.

???: “Well, you’re free to say that as you waaant. But you get so happy when people praise you, you can’t help but grin so biiig, that’s what’s so cute about you, Neru-Neruuu.”

Dragging the ends of her sentences, a rather dopey voice cut into the conversation.

It came from the opposite side of Sekhmet, and from Minerva’s left.

???: “Neru-Neruuu, you really are like a Witch when it comes to not being honest with your feelingsss. I like that about you so much I just want to eat iiit.”

Minerva: “Shut up, Daphne. You were sleeping until now, why’d you have to wake up all of a sudden?”

Daphne: “But I’ve been awake ever since Neru-Neru made a ruckus and started flashing your undies. You go around wearing a tiny skirt that flies up whenever you move, and still you wear those cutie undiesss, tsk tskkk, Neru-Neruuu.”

Minerva: “Y—you’re one to talk! You’re younger than me, and yours are simply obscene! The hell is that? That’s not underwear, that’s a string, dumbass! What’re you, a dumbass!? Stupid dumbass! Seriously, you’re just a hopeless dumbass, you know that? Dumbass dumbass!”

Red in the face and teary-eyed from emotion, Minerva squeaked back— while the one happily ignoring her would be the Witch of Gluttony, Daphne.

With her body completely restrained and her eyes covered by crisscrossing blindfolds, her small body was settled inside a strange black coffin. Though this thing was just casually hanging out at the table like it was natural, to an outsider, this tea party must have seemed utterly surreal.

Running out of insults to throw at Daphne (though it was just saying “dumbass” over and over), Minerva plopped back into her chair, buried her face in her palms, and slumped over the table.

Minerva: “Whatsthiswhatsthiswhatsthis! Like, is this supposed to be my fault? It’s not like I’m doing it to get praised, but of course you’re gonna be happy when someone praises you. When someone says «thank you», of course you’re gonna think «I’m so glad I did that». Is that so wrong? Am I in the wrong here? I want to heal everyone, but I want to be healed too...”

Echidna: “The fact that you didn’t explode into a state of self-abandon just now is just a part of your charm, I suppose— Now.”

Leaving aside Minerva, who had checked out of the conversation by sinking into a sea of her own brooding, Echidna set her sights on Daphne.

With both eyes covered, Daphne shouldn’t have been able to sense Echidna’s gaze, but her small nose nonetheless twitched adorably with a few little sniffs,

Daphne: “Dona-Dona, what’re you staring at Daphne foor? Unlike Neru-Neru and Met-Mett, Daphne can’t stand a whole conversation with you, you knooow. Besides... haa... haaaaa... I’m already running out of calorieees.”

Echidna: “There’s nothing more foolish than asking cooperation from a Witch... I’ve already learned that far too well while I was alive... but I never thought this conversation would go this badly, you’ve all outdone yourselves, I almost want to congratulate you.”

Mumbling this, Echidna lifted her right hand and gave her fingers a snap. Instantly, a steaming cup of tea and a plate full of cookies appeared in front of Daphne. Her blindfolded eyes widening, Daphne immediately lit up at the appearance of food.

Echidna: “Of course, I don’t intend to keep you waiting, so if you want to eat befor...”

Daphne: “Gafugafu- Omuomu- Muchumuchu-.”

Echidna: “Forget I said anything... Though I’d rather hoped you would practice better table manners.”

Echidna shrugged, while in front of her, Daphne threw her whole upper body onto the table as she ate— Quite literally, she was putting her whole body into it.

Even though she was making eating noises with her mouth, the tea and pastries were sucked in directly upon contact with her skin. The offered tea and pastries, along with the wares made out of pottery, all disappeared inside Daphne, instantly becoming Gluttony’s feed.

Daphne: “Aaaaa, so tastyyy, so sweeeet... Ohh, sorryyy. I went a little overboard and gobbled the table toooo.”

Echidna: “Don’t worry about it... Rather, I wouldn’t go so far as to say that, but I more or less realized this would happen the moment I invited you. There’s nothing I’d desire more from you than to be a little more prudent with yourself.”

Daphne: “Dona-Donaaa, would you tell birds not to fly and fishes not to swim toooo?”

Hearing Daphne’s roundabout refusal, Echidna sighed, while, having finished her treat, Daphne wriggled her body and continued with “Alriiight”,

Daphne: “My tummy’s got food in iiit, so I’ll keep Dona-Dona company a bit longeeer— You were saying something about parallel universees?”

Echidna: “That’s right. Daphne, do you have any thoughts on it?”

Daphne: “I don’t really think anythiiiiing? What if this and thiiis, then maybe that and thaaaaat, my tummy won’t be filled even if I think about iiit. Haa, but if it’s a split about whether I’ll eat meat tonight or fish toniiight, then maybe it won’t be so silly to think abooout.”

Echidna: “In your case, Daphne, there’s nothing to complain about in terms of comprehension... Looks like it’s just a matter of capturing your interest. That’s also to be expected, I guess.”

Out of all the Witches, Daphne’s temperament could be considered mild. The problem was that her very existence was a calamity to other living things, and, regardless of temperament, this vicious constitution made her hopelessly unsuited for coexistence with others.

Sekhmet: “So in the end, haa. Even if we speculate about parallel worlds, huu. It’s completely useless, haa... Isn’t it, huu.”

The one inserting this unprogressive comment into the conversation was the Witch of Sloth, still entirely slumped over the table. Blanketed in her own long hair, she looked at the onlooking Echidna, and then at the onsmelling Daphne.

Sekhmet: “Even if you accept this school of thought and the existence of these branching worlds, haa. There’s no way to really know or experience it for yourself, huu. So then, they’ll only be bubbles of unreachable possibilities, haa. Ones that’ll pop and vanish the moment you touch them, huu.”

Echidna: “Indeed, from a realistic perspective, it is as you say. Even if we are aware of the existence of parallel worlds, they could not be observed. Parallel, is truly an apt description. Two lines, never to meet— Parallel worlds would mean different worlds extending in parallel.”

Minerva: “—But, that’s not the case for the Second Trial, right?”

As Echidna summarized Sekhmet’s argument, her conclusion was finished off by Minerva’s thorny interruption. Minerva’s lovely face was dyed red with fury,

Minerva: “If Echidna’s going out of her way to talk about it, it must be heading somewhere mean. Right? Caught you out, didn’t I. Must feel like I jabbed you where it hurts, doesn’t it. If you don’t want to be found out, then don’t do something that you’d want to hide.”

Echidna: “I didn’t even say it, and you’re already mad at me. I’d feel troubled too, you know... But well, it’s true that I can’t deny it. After all, that’s how the Second Trial was supposed to work.”

Watching Minerva punch a dent into the table, Echidna lightly reached out, as a book with black binding appeared in her hand. This was Echidna's book of forbidden knowledge which held the world's past, present, and future—the Memories of the World.

If the Thirst for Knowledge Incarnate, Echidna, ever felt like it, she could access any information, knowledge, or history within this world. But, out of personal preference, she seemed to feel an aversion to using the power of this forbidden tome.

Echidna: "The Second Trial reads into the challenger's heart and finds every crossroad he had passed—one could also call it regret. The Memories of the World recreates the different choices he might have made, as presents that were not to be. In its very nature, compared to the First Trial of facing one's past, and the Third Trial of overcoming one's future, the Second Trial is somewhat easier to pass."

Minerva: "Easier to pass, what do you mean?"

Echidna: "It's a question of whether one could see the world as Daphne does. As Sekhmet said, so-called parallel worlds would ultimately remain separated, untouchable lines never to meet. Regardless of regret, or longing, they could never be reached."

Minerva: "And here your Trial is shoving those lines right in people's faces!"

Seeing Minerva turn up the ends of her eyes in annoyance, Echidna lightly shrugged.

She brushed her hand through her own white hair, and said, as if to calm the now standing Minerva,

Echidna: "To the common person, the Second Trial is indeed easier to pass. Compared to having to overcome a past that actually happened, the Second Trial merely touches on the possibilities of what could have been. It is each person's freedom to accept or deny it... and all one has to do is to accept the present, current world."

Minerva: "The current, world..."

Echidna: "And we are back to the question of perspective. Sekhmet, Daphne, or even you could easily find the solution—if you could do that, then you would pass the Trials."

Listening to Echidna's explanation, Minerva gave a begrudgingly nod.

Indeed, if it was as Echidna said, then the Trials isn't as harsh as she thought. For all the Witches present— Or even just for anyone with a clear sense of self-identity, it should be easy to pass that Trials.

Daphne: "If sooo, then whyyy, is Subarun having such a hard time with iiit? Subaruuun doesn't look like a child with no sense of identityyy."

Echidna: "—In his case... Hm."

Recalling Subaru in her memories, for some reason, Daphne started making a chewing motion with her mouth. Overlooking this behavior, Echidna closed her eyes to ponder on her words,

Echidna: "The Second Trial is an observation of parallel worlds. In a sense, it is an act of witnessing the implications of one's regrets. Like I said, it is easy to accept or deny it— In fact, one would only have to rationalize it by noting that reality never progressed this way."

"But", Echidna continued,

Echidna: "Only in his case, this wouldn't apply. It was even a surprise to me that the Second Trial hit him this hard— Truly beyond my expectations."

Daphne: "Snifffff snifffff... I could smell you grinning with joy, Dona-Donaaa."

Minerva: "She gets happy whenever she sees something she couldn't predict, I bet. Nasty pervert... Just hopeless."

Echidna: "Birds of a feather. Since you are all my friends, you aren't exempt from that, either."

Daphne chuckled while Minerva puffed with rage, and, if one listened carefully, one could hear snoring coming from Sekhmet's general direction. Taking each of these Witches' reactions into her eyes, Echidna rocked in her chair, when,

?????: "Donaaaaaaa Typhon's hungry toooo."

Running up from the meadow with little steps was a little girl. As if to leap onto the table on the hill, she called out to Echidna. With green hair and auburn skin, and her white teeth beaming in her smile, it was the Witch of Pride, Typhon.

Seeing the girl who had avoided getting involved in the tricky conversation and had instead passed her time playing in the meadow, Echidna smiled back,

Echidna: “Sorry for boring you. Now for Typhon’s tea... should I make it extra sweet? And do you want your regular treats?”

Typhon: “Anything’s goood. Running around a lot took up all my strength, I want drink and eat and rest noooow.”

Saying this with incredible energy, Typhon pulled out an empty chair next to Sekhmet and hopped onto it. Then, with one hand playing with Sekhmet’s long hair, she used the other to stuff her face with treats Echidna had made appear with a snap of her fingers, spraying crumbs all over the table.

This scene might just bring out a smile onto the face of someone who was ignorant of Typhon’s nature.

Echidna: “You must be tired too, from looking after Typhon?”

?????: “Th—that’s not, true... though? T—Typhon’s a good girl, and, her powers... also, wouldn’t, work... on, me, you know? S—so, it’s fine. I’m, doing just fine.”

Looking up at Echidna from her side, the one who arrived at the tea party one step behind Typhon gave this stuttering reply with a weak smile rising on her face. With her pink hair reaching down to her waists, the girl gave off a shockingly ephemeral vibe. Though there was nothing outstanding about her features, for some reason, she just naturally attracted one’s gaze.

More than anything, like a small animal, the impressions of her expressions and bearing tugged powerfully on one’s heartstrings.

Echidna: “Take a seat, Carmilla— I’ve called you here for a reason.”

Carmilla: “I—is, something... st—starting? It, wo—won’t be scary?”

Echidna: “There will be nothing scary or painful— I’d merely like your help to get the pieces moving.”

Sitting down next to her, Carmilla— the Witch of Lust, timidly looked back at Echidna. Echidna gave her a smile, and lithely flung out her arms,

Echidna: “—With your love, I wish to rescue a poor lost lamb.”

Echidna said in the trembling voice of a Witch, and offered her outstretched arms—

Arc 4 Chapter 72 - BADEND 1, 5, 11

Has been cut from the Light Novel Adaptation for the most part, last section adapted in Volume 12,
Chapter 5 “Ending List”, Part 20 (to be continued)

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken – [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#), [Part 4](#)

—How many times does my heart have to break before I can be forgiven?

???: “And it’s already over... this job really wasn’t worth taking.”

In a dark warehouse, gazing down on the three corpses submerged in an ocean of blood, a black-robed beauty slightly tilted her head.

Even in this blood-suffused scene, the absurdity of her skill ensured that she wasn’t touched by a single drop, while the abnormality of her mind was such that she remained utterly unfazed by this carnage.

Without a doubt, this was what they’d call a monster in human skin.

Stepping across the floor soaked in blood, the monster looked over the fallen corpses with interest. A giant old man with one arm severed at the shoulder and profuse blood draining down his head. A black-haired youth with a perfect line sliced across his stomach, having died writhing as his intestines spilled out.

—And, a silver-haired girl, slashed in two from her left shoulder to her right waist.

—How many times had he struggled and fought just so he wouldn’t have to witness this scene?

???: “In terms of the outcome of the assignment, this is as bad as it gets... Although, I wonder what’s with all this.”

Holding a finger to her red lips, the monster casually made this awfully out-of-place mutter. Dangling in her other hand, was a sinister, bloody, crooked blade— her Kukri knife. Swaying the weapon that had just stolen three— No, four separate lives in this loot house, the monster named Elsa let out a splendid smile.

Elsa: “—Aya.”

Elsa tilted her head, and lightly leaped backward.

Immediately, a blade of ice stabbed into the floor where Elsa had been standing. A sequence of icy spears followed, pursuing Elsa’s steps with shearing, biting fangs.

Elsa: “Now this is...”

???: “How— dare you.”

Before the evading Elsa, dim specks of light gathered in the empty space as the figure of a small Spirit took shape. The floating cat-Spirit, Puck, had a perilous expression, while his androgynous voice was trembling with rage.

Puck: “You shall regret taking Lia’s life—”

Elsa: “Ah, so the girl... was a Spiritual Arts user. Marvelous... I’ve never opened a Spirit’s stomach before— Though.”

Facing the battle-ready Puck surrounded by floating ice lances, Elsa’s expression reveled in the premonition of battle. But, before raising her guard, she squinted a single eye,

Elsa: “Why didn’t you show up before that child died? Spirits and Spiritual Arts Users should be teams of two— It’s a shame if I can’t enjoy the full experience.”

Puck: “Shut it with your drivel, murderer— If I weren’t bound by my Contract, I...”

Puck shook his head with an expression twisted in vexation. He bared his fang, pointing his little arm at Elsa,

Puck: “I have no intention to chat. I will freeze you, and lay Lia’s soul to rest. After you, the Kingdom, the world, then the Dragon and the Witch. Everything.”

Elsa: “Haaa, marvelous— I’ll be enjoying this!”

Elsa leaped, crawling along the walls and ceiling like a spider. With her slender frame as the target, icicles shot forth in quick succession, piercing the walls of the loot house and freezing the atmosphere, as its shrill shrieks rang through the air.

All vision clouded over with white, until nothing could be seen. Not even the incidentally intertwined fingers on the floor, nor Subaru and Emilia’s corpses. Nothing.

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—How many times do I have to be betrayed by this world before I can be rewarded?

Rem: “I was merely preventing the situation from getting any worse. By the time I found him, Subaru-kun’s state was already beyond saving— He would have wished to be put down immediately.”

Emilia: “And, so... That’s what that... horrible end... was. Is that what you are saying... Rem? Subaru was my benefactor, and there was so much we would have liked to talk about... and you...”

He heard the quarreling words of his two beloved girls.

One voice called out within Subaru both immense adoration and insurmountable grief.

And the other voice, when he stood in the face of adversity, how many times, how clingingly, how imploringly, and how sweetly, had he wished to be touched by that voice.

The blue-haired girl and the silver-haired girl faced each other, as a turbulent atmosphere flowed throughout the room. The place was the lounge in the mansion, the two were seated on either side of the table, and the situation was set to explode.

Roswaal: “Weeell now, Emilia-sama mustn’t get carried away, either. Fiiirst of all, we should heeeear what Rem’s haaas to say, no?”

Emilia: “Roswaal... do you understand what has happened here? Rem... Your servant, has caused the... dea... death... of my benefactor... and your guest... Subaru.”

Roswaal: “Ooof course I understand. Thaaat is why I’m... making sure we keep the conversation in line— We mustn’t let any misunderstandings get in the way of our mutual feelings.”

Roswaal narrowed his yellow eye as he replied. Then, the clown turned his gaze towards Rem, seated beside him. Sensing his gaze, Rem nodded,

Rem: “Late last night in the east wing... there was an intruder on Emilia-sama’s level. Alerted to this by the alarm gems, Rem immediately went to the scene, and that’s when I found Subaru-kun crawling on the floor.”

Ram: “Barusu was already under the curse’s effects by then.”

Rem: “Yes, it is as onee-sama said. Subaru-kun was weakened to the verge of death. The curse’s effects had sapped his vitality to its absolute limit, and I determined that saving him was impossible...”

Emilia: “And so you crushed him to death with your flail— That brutality only added to his suffering.”

Ram: “Emilia-sama—”

Holding Rem’s hand at her side, Ram shot a harsh glare towards Emilia. But Emilia’s sharp, unrelenting gaze remained locked onto Rem,

Emilia: “The facts are facts... Subaru’s body, his arm, and his head... If you wanted to put him out of his misery, there should have been a gentler way. Instead, why did you...”

Rem: “That’s, because...”

Emilia: “...”

Rem couldn’t answer Emilia’s question. She did not say anything further, perhaps because her personality was not one for telling lies, and Emilia’s words had struck the core of her true motives.

Rem had harbored intense distrust towards Subaru back then.

After the second round of the loops in the mansion— Having failed to conceal Subaru's corpse after crushing him to death in the hallway, events led to this current discussion here.

Subaru's friendly interaction with Ram must have only further inflamed her hostility, to the point where she could no longer resist her murderous intent.

—Just what was she thinking when she swung her iron flail towards Subaru in the upper floors of the mansion?

Perhaps even Rem didn't know this herself.

Emilia: “—It was a slip of the hand... or because you hesitated... Those were the answers I wanted to hear...”

Rem: “———Hk.”

With closed eyes, Emilia sadly murmured as Rem's face shot up. It was unclear how much of Rem's true feelings Emilia had grasped when she said those words. And it would always, forever remain unclear.

Roswaal: “Emilia-sama, where are you going?”

Seeing Emilia stand up, patting off the hems of her skirt, Roswaal's expression vanished as he asked her this question. Hearing it, Emilia brushed her hand over her long, silver hair,

Emilia: “—I'm leaving. It has only been a short while, but thank you for your hospitality. Without your backing, I would not have been able to participate in the Royal Selection. But... I cannot trust you anymore.”

Roswaal: “Even if you don't trust us, surely our relationship of mutual utilization would still be beneficial, don't you think? Forfeiting your place for the sake of a tantrum couldn't be called a wise decision.”

Emilia: “Tantrum...?”

Hearing Roswaal's remark, Emilia stopped in place as her expression stiffened in shock. Then, she promptly turned her steps towards Roswaal, and,

Roswaal: “———”

No one could have stopped that crisp sound from ringing out.

Her white fingers slapped hard across Roswaal's blue-and-white cheek.

In front of the reddened, swelling cheek, the single slap already left Emilia out of breath. The one who had been slapped made no reaction, but instead held Ram back as she was about to stand with her changed complexion.

Roswaal: "Ram."

Ram: "But, Roswaal-sama——"

Roswaal: "It's fine. You can stay seated. Emilia-sama, my apologies for Ram."

Emilia: "This is what you're always like to me... but you're still saying nothing about Subaru..."

Biting her lip, Emilia glared at the collected Roswaal. But despite the furious rage churning in her amethyst eyes, Roswaal never lost his composure for an instant.

This was only a testament to their irreconcilable standpoints.

Roswaal: "Once you leave the mansion, and return to the forest—— what will you have left?"

Emilia: "I was wrong to have been taken along by your beguiling words. My atonement... My penance will come in many other forms. I was mistaken about it. And because I was, Subaru died."

Emilia closed her eyes, and quietly answered Roswaal's question.

Then, with a slight shake of her head,

Emilia: "I will bring his soul with me and lay him to rest in the forest—— For Subaru, and the others, for as long it takes, I will devote my time to tend to their souls. That is all I will say."

With this, Emilia backed away from Roswaal, indicating that she had no intention to continue the conversation. Her silver hair swayed as she turned her back, while Roswaal watched on with his mismatched eyes. Still seated in his chair, he reached out his hand towards the leaving figure—— But put it down again.

Roswaal: “Should this veer away from the writ, then... this is where my paath ends.”

Ram: “Roswaal-sama...”

Hearing Roswaal’s powerless whisper, Ram spilled a voice of concern as she took his hand. The clown glanced back at the girl’s worried gaze, while a weak smile rose onto his face,

Roswaal: “Ram, it seems you’ve won the waager. Here is where my purpose reaches a standstill... That is to say, the Contract can now be fulfilled.”

Ram: “...Yes. Yes, Roswaal-sama.”

Leaving the two to their quiet exchange, Emilia proceeded toward Rem, who had stood up to open the door. Before passing her by, she looked to her solemnly bowed head,

Emilia: “Lead me to where Subaru is.”

Rem: “Emilia-sama, that would be...”

Emilia: “He’s in an awful state, I know. I will restore him as much as I can... And take him with me... to the forest.”

Watching the side of Emilia’s grief-stricken face, Rem’s expression stiffened as she lowered her head. Within that expression was something like regret, as well as something like anger.

Why did it have to turn out like this, she must’ve been wondering.

—Why did it turn out like this? No one knew the answer.

Emilia: “I’m sorry, Subaru— I couldn’t do anything at all.”

Emilia whispered at the very end.

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—How many times do I have to be hit with my own stupidity before I can understand?

???: “Desu, desu! Desudesudesudesu, DESU!!”

The shrill, deafening cackle echoed on.

Chest pumped, mouth stretched wide, drooling from the lips and mussing her long, red hair, a young woman was howling.

This woman’s abhorrent behavior, her bloodshot, gawking eyes, and the deranged posture she had taken were nothing like those of a human.

Woman: “For love! To love! In love! By love! The repayment of love is! Everything! DESU! Aah! Oh witch! O beloved witch! DESTINED HARBOR OF MY LOVE!”

Falling to her knees, with both hands stretched to the sky and tears streaming from her eyes, the woman extolled her love.

All around the crazed woman, were submerged corpses scattered in an ocean of blood. Limbs torn apart, heads gouged open, lay countless cadavers stripped of human dignity. In their midst, was the body of a black-haired youth, his throat pierced by his own sword.

Blood drowned every corner of Arlam Village, as every member of the expedition lay upon the ground, deprived of the last sign of life.

The moment their most powerful asset, the Sword Demon, fell in the ambush, the tide was already set. The rest was a massacre by the Unseen Hands, an uninterrupted chain of death-wails until the last of them met their end.

Woman: “Behold my diligence! What could this cleansing of Sloth be called, if not a testament of my love! DESU! Aaah! My adoration, my faith, my unshakable love! Receive it! Accept it! May it nestle within your embrace— DESU!!”

Decrying her love, tears pouring, the woman barked amid the sea of blood— Her flesh stolen, her mind invaded by the monster, Petelgeuse Romanée-Conti.

After wiping out Subaru’s rescue party in one fell swoop, despite the loss of his cultists, the madman went on proclaiming his love. When—

???: “—What... happened?”

A winded girl muttered as she ran down the path trailing from the village. Impatiently wiping aside the silver hair sticking to her forehead, she scanned her amethyst eyes over the carnage— Emilia’s eyes widened at the villagers submerged in the ocean of blood, and noticed it.

Emilia: “Suba... ru?”

Lying in the center of the carnage, was a youth she had known well.

Just what emotion flashed through her mind in that instant? The feelings in those widened eyes were far too complex, such that no one, not even herself, could have understood it. Only, Emilia’s lips trembled, as she,

Emilia: “Why, is... Subaru, sleeping th... Huh?”

Puck: “Lia—! This is bad, it’s the Witch Cult! A Sin Arch... Why, why now!?”

Emilia’s expression was stunned, and one not accepting reality. In her stead, Puck flew out in a terribly panicked state.

Flying circles around Emilia while fixing his glare on Petelgeuse, standing alone in that carnage, his black round eyes were rife with alarm and hostility.

Puck: “Lia! Now, right now! Get away from here now! That thing... you mustn’t meet with that Sin Archbishop! The Ordeal will begin! If it gets imposed on you, it will be terrifying!”

Emilia: “Puck...?”

Puck: “I just remembered, I finally remembered! That bastard... meeting that bastard finally made me remember! Why did I forget... And there’re so many things I still can’t recall... Unless, I can’t remember until things become like this... but if so, then!”

Facing towards the sky, Puck stretched out his little body as far as it would go, and screamed.

Puck: “This is not as you said— ECHIDNAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!”

Loaded with frustration and loathing, the shout echoed out as Puck panted, shaking his head. All the while, Emilia fell speechless in front of her utterly changed companion.

Having heard the scream, the madman slowly stood upright.

Petelgeuse: “Well well... How pleased to meet you! DESU!”

Slanting his upper body, Petelgeuse violently yanked at his long red hair, mercilessly pulling as blood began seeping out of his scalp. Watching this act of self-injury, horror and disgust flickered across Emilia’s eyes.

Petelgeuse: “I am... Sin Archbishop of the Witch Cult, representing Sloth— Petelgeuse Romanée-Conti... DESU!”

The madman cackled, his voice quaking the atmosphere.

Just like this, the howling madman slanted his body as he observed the petrified Emilia from head to toe then to her upper body, practically licking her all over with his gaze,

Petelgeuse: “...In, credible, desu.”

He spilled this sigh of wonder. A crisp peal of a clap. Petelgeuse was clapping, directing his applause at Emilia.

Petelgeuse: “Incredible— DESU! A figure so perfect for a vessel! A visage so reminiscent of the witch in life! Since you’ve prepared such a magnificent vessel, there is no more need for debate! DESU! The Ordeal! The Ordeal to determine whether the Witch Factor shall take root!¹³⁶”

Puck: “Silence, madman! You take one step towards that child! And I will make you regret ever being born—! Utterly!”

Petelgeuse: “In the face of love, pain and fear are all offerings for the sacrifice... Nothing you say would give me reason to stop, DESU.”

¹³⁶ Albeit the Kanji used is the same as the one used for Echidna’s Trials, I am using Ordeal out of my own wish to distinguish them somehow.

Puck met Petelgeuse's raving with a threat, but the madman didn't seem to mind. Dragging its steps along the ground, it slowly approached, while Puck only seemed to tremble, unable to do a thing.

Puck: "Wh... y. Why, does this have to be the moment when I... no, that's wrong. I remember now. That's wrong. Yes, that's wrong, that's wrong! That's wrong! I'm... I... I..."

Emilia: "Puck! Wh-what should I... what should I do!? I-I'm... and Subaru... over there he's..."

Petelgeuse: "The Ordeal! The terminus of this diligent soul is selected, DESU! An occupied vessel, would interfere with the injected soul, DESU! The contents, are unneeded— DESU!"

Emilia desperately called to Puck, who was hugging his head. While Petelgeuse went on towards the bewildered pair without stopping.

Watching Petelgeuse making strange motions with his fingers and licking his lips, blaring alarms sounded inside Emilia without end. At the sight of his deranged eyes, Emilia gasped, and, in a choking voice,

Emilia: "No... I'm scared, daddy... Ah—"

She whimpered, pleading for someone to rely on.

Seeking help in a voice so quiet that no one could have heard it.

Petelgeuse completely ignored this as he extended his hand towards Emilia. Surely, beyond that hand, would be the invisible Authority of Sloth, the Unseen Hand. It would be reaching to bind Emilia's petrified body, to enact its evil designs—

Puck: "—Get your filthy hands away from my daughter!!¹³⁷"

The next moment, a wall of ice of incredible density and height emerged in front of Emilia. Dividing the space between her and Petelgeuse, the wall continued to expand, bursting from the ground. In the matter of an instant, even Petelgeuse, with his Unseen Hands outspread, was forced to leap backwards.

¹³⁷ Note by SummaryAnon: "Puck's pronoun changes from his usual «boku» (ボク) to «ore» (俺). Puck's speaking style changes drastically on some lines from this point. If pressed to describe it, I would call it a lot like Subaru, as «ore» is the same pronoun Subaru uses. For other lines it sounds more like normal Puck."

Petelgeuse: “That’s—!”

Puck: “I’ve finally remembered the most important thing of all... If it’s to protect it, Contracts and constraints can go to hell for all I care. What a worthless thing I’ve been bound to... Now, I finally remember.”

Hearing this rare sign of hesitation in Petelgeuse’s voice, the little cat floating in space quietly proclaimed.

The aura of bewilderment had vanished, as the Spirit glared at the madman with a liberated air.

Puck: “I remember now, why I’ve become like this. It was to protect my daughter, at last— If the price to do so was such a constraint... that vile wretch...”

Emilia: “Puck— Ah.”

Emilia extended her fingers towards the rueful Puck, when her throat froze.

At her breast, was a crystal glowing with green light. It was Puck’s Spiritual residence, the vital stone tying him and Emilia together. But suddenly, without the slightest touch, the stone shattered into dust.

Emilia: “What... Wh—why...!?”

Puck: “I... I have broken out of the confine, and the consequences have begun. Perhaps even this was foreseen from the start... But still.”

Turning around, Puck floated down to the level of Emilia’s eyes.

A flicker of doubt flashed through Emilia’s pupils at Puck’s gesture. But, gazing into her, Puck’s expression was that of someone gazing at something precious and beloved.

Puck: “Lia, this is goodbye—”

Emilia: “Wh...”

Puck: “The Anchor has been broken. I cannot be tied to this body anymore. As much as I wish to stay by your side, that too is part of the price— I’m sorry.”

Emilia: “No, don’t, Puck... Everyone... Everyone’s gone... Subaru is... He’s... Everyone’s... gone! Puck... if you leave me too... I... I’ll be all alone... I don’t... want... to...”

Like a whimpering child, Emilia pleaded as tears poured from her eyes. Puck used his long tail to wipe away her tears, and gently touched his lips to the tip of the crying girl’s nose.

Puck: “Be a good girl and listen now. There’s still Ram in the mansion. Betty is also around. If you ever need to, you can rely on Betty. That child... would never refuse you. Though, knowing this, it is rather mean of me to ask this of her.”

Emilia: “I...! Puck, other than you, I have no one...”

Puck: “—Go now. My most cherished in this world, my cutest, most beloved Emilia.”

Emilia: “Wai—”

Before Emilia could say a thing, Puck’s little body pushed hard against her forehead.

Unable to withstand the unexpected force, Emilia’s body was sent swimming backwards— When instantly, a tear in space swallowed up her slender frame,

Emilia: “Wh—”

In a blink, Emilia’s figure vanished from the village.

—Watching this to the end, Puck spilled a long, drawn out sigh.

Puck: “Sorry for forcing you to do this, Beatrice.”

Puck thanked his accomplice in the abrupt disappearance. Then, he turned around, and looked to Petelgeuse, who had been staring at him,

Puck: “You just sat there quietly watching... Pretty good manners for a religious fanatic, huh?”

Petelgeuse: “It looked like if I did anything, you’d have crushed me in an instant, DESU. Either way, it’ll be all the same once I make my way to the mansion, DESU. Purposeful aggravations were entirely unnecessary... DESU.”

Puck: “I see. You may look deranged, but you’re surprisingly thoughtful— You fucking scum.”

Spitting this out, Puck flew over the wall of ice into Petelgeuse’s side. Not even Petelgeuse did anything as foolish as using his Unseen Hands to stall the approach.

Then, they faced each other with a certain distance between them,

Puck: “There is no time— Hurry up and start, so we can get this over with. The rest... I will leave to my trusty little sister.”

Petelgeuse: “Something’s changed about you, desu. For a Spirit, you are quite human-like.”

Puck: “—Yeah, I guess I am.”

Puck rubbed his little hand against his pink nose with a cynical smile.

Puck: “I may look like this now, but my limbs used to be a little longer, and my face would’ve been rather handsome, too. When my daughter is that cute, isn’t that only natural?”

Petelgeuse: “...I’m having trouble understanding you, desu.”

Puck: “Well, nevermind. I wasn’t expecting you to understand... Since you are about to die here, anyway.”

Saying this, Puck pointed his arms towards Petelgeuse as his body began to turn white.

He was running out of Mana, and losing his ability to keep hold of this body. Perhaps, this was partly because his bond with Emilia was severed, and partly because he had broken the constraint he had mentioned earlier.

Either way, the contours of his form began to fade—

Puck: “Before I am extinguished, I will extinguish you first. Who would’ve thought my companion in death would be a religious nutcase. Gross.”

Petelgeuse: “Sorry to tell you this, desu, but even if you destroy this body, that won’t st—”

Puck: “I will freeze your soul alongside it— If I do that, what would happen, I wonder?”

The dauntless grin on Petelgeuse's face up to now abruptly froze.

Watching the madman's eyes widen, Puck smiled an utterly delighted smile,

Puck: "Aaah— Now there's the face I wanted to see, you moron."

In an instant, simultaneous with the unravelling of the Spirit's contours, a white radiance blasted forth, and—

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—Forced to witness the endings of worlds one after another, Subaru lay collapsed upon the ground.

He could not tell where he was anymore.

Was this reality, or was he inside a dream? Could it be one of those cycling nightmares? And if it was a nightmare, would he be absolved so simply?

Were they really just possibilities? Or were they worlds that actually existed? Could they merely have been convenient fancies that Subaru's mind had invented? If so, then how does he explain the previously unknown information contained within them?

Were they worlds born out of delusion? Were they alternate realities feeding on each other? Whichever it may be, the torment to Subaru's heart was colossal. So much so, that he could not stand, or raise his head, or do anything at all. And so—

Rem: "Are you no longer able to stand? Subaru-kun?"

He heard someone at his side, gently uplifting his heart with those words.

He thought it was the voice of someone he loved.

Subaru: "——"

The hot streaks of tears that should no longer be spilling drew their trails down Subaru's cheek.



Arc 4 Chapter 73 - Where Weakness Resides

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 12, Chapter 5 “Ending List”, Parts 20-21

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#)

—How long had it been since he last heard that voice?

In reality, she hadn’t been sleeping for all that long.

At most a week, a conceivable timespan for going without seeing one’s friends or family— But Subaru could not think that way.

For Subaru, who was constantly shedding off his life and time, actual timespan meant nothing. According to his soul’s internal clock, a far longer interval had passed since that voice had last struck upon his eardrums, and his heart.

Rem: “—Wake up, Subaru-kun, I’d be happier if I could see your face.”

The words rained down from above as he lay face-down on the ground.

The tender compassion and the heated affection contained within that voice swiftly filled Subaru’s chest with warmth, and instilled the parched, empty vessel of his heart with searing heat.

All this, from a single sentence whispered by that gentle voice.

—Just how much strength had she given him?

Subaru: “...You have to be joking.”

Rem: “No, this is not a joke.”

Subaru: “You can’t be here.”

Rem: "Should you desire it, Subaru-kun, I will always be at your side."

Subaru: "Whenever there's something important I must do... Whenever I feel this way... It's like you'd always come to me... but how could... something that convenient..."

Rem: "Well, I've always wanted to be the girl who'd just so conveniently happen to be at Subaru-kun's side."

With his sobbing voice, he spilled that pathetic whimper. But the voice that answered did not look down on him, nor think any less of him.

She knew.

Knew, that Subaru was weak, helpless, so brittle that he could not live without something to cling to, always lacking confidence, and perpetually in doubt.

Nevertheless, this girl told this hopelessly weak Subaru that she loved him.

Subaru: "—Rem."

Rem: "Yes. It's Subaru-kun's Rem."

He lifted his head.

Blue arises in his teary vision. Roughly wiping his eyes with his dirtied sleeve, banishing his tears, he saw.

The form of the girl standing before him.

The form of his beloved Rem.

Subaru: "Rem..."

Rem: "Yes, Rem. The maid who's always within arm's reach when Subaru-kun wants her there."

Subaru: "Y—you..."

Slightly tilting her head, Rem replied in a playful tone.

Just before he could say something about her attitude, he felt the air calmly seep out of his lungs. With a thump, the heavy burden in his chest dropped to the ground.

His breathing eased, and the tiny self, screaming in his skull, disappeared.

Being so easily, so so easily saved, Subaru was struck dumb. He had thought himself hopeless and stuck, and yet, upon seeing this single girl standing before his eyes, he was so easily released.

Subaru: “You’re incredible, Rem...”

Rem: “Why thank you. Subaru-kun is amazing too.”

Smiling as she spoke, their exchange was just as perfectly off-beat as it always was.

Feeling such happiness at this back and forth, everything he had tried to endure up to now suddenly turned to tears on the verge of falling.

While he was pinned to the ground, casting down his eyes, Rem kneeled before him,

Rem: “Are you alright? Are you feeling worn out?”

Subaru: “Who... knows... Maybe I am... worn out... but nothing... is finished yet.”

In these never-ending, looping worlds, Subaru had been battered and torn without reaching a single answer. He was in no position to say he was worn out.

Not while everyone else suffered more. Not while everyone else was enduring more. Just why did everyone else have to suffer along with him? —The answer was obvious.

Subaru: “It’s because I’m too weak.”

Rem: “_____”

Subaru: “Because I’m always lacking.”

Rem: “_____”

Subaru: “If only I were a stronger, smarter, and a less useless guy... they wouldn’t have to suffer, grieve, or hurt like this...”

If Subaru was strong enough to do everything on his own, then the task of consoling Emilia’s broken heart in the face of her past, easing the sorrow of Beatrice’s four-hundred years of solitude, saving Petra and Frederica from the murderer’s blade, defending the people of the Sanctuary from the Great Rabbit’s threat, and reaching an understanding with Garfiel who sought to keep his distance from outsiders—would all have fallen to him.

Everything, all of it, every last aspect, was Subaru’s fault.

And so, in order to overcome this balance sheet of his own weakness, Subaru had to scour his soul and start anew.

—Or so he thought, and yet,

Subaru: “I didn’t save anyone... in the end... did I?”

Rem: “Subaru-kun.”

Subaru: “If these worlds continued after my death, then how many... How many times... How many people... have I left to die?”

Rem: “Subaru-kun.”

Subaru: “How many times did I let you die? How many times do I need to... kill you before it’s enough?”

Rem: “—Subaru-kun.”

Shuddering from a dread surging from the depths of his body, Subaru ravingly confessed his sins. Expelling them from his lips, he only wanted instant sentencing for his crimes. Before he could crush his own heart to dust, he wanted someone, anyone, to carry out his punishment for him.

He desired that someone smack this colossal idiot, who, while pledging to no longer make mistakes, had tread down the wrong path on their very first step, and let him know what a hopeless moron he was.

Subaru: “———”

—But Subaru’s plea for punishment was answered by a gentle, enveloping embrace.

Subaru: “Re... m.”

Rem: “It’s alright. Everything is alright, Subaru-kun.”

Subaru: “But, noth... nothing is... alright... is it.”

Nothing. Subaru hadn’t succeeded in anything. If Subaru slackened now, absolutely no one would be saved. Countless people would meet their end. Rem too, was someone Subaru absolutely must save.

Because only she had the right to chastise this inadequate, insufficient, hopelessly weak Natsuki Subaru.

Subaru: “You should be... at me...!”

Rem: “—I love you.”

She pressed her forehead against his, and whispered those loving words.

Subaru: “———”

No words escaped him.

There was nothing he could say.

So near, her light-blue eyes were looking directly into his. He could drown in the depths of the compassion in those eyes.

Rem: “I love you, Subaru-kun— And so, everything is alright.”

Subaru: “Th... at’s... not an answer...”

Rem: “Yes, it is. Why is it I am here? Why is it I forgive you? Why is it that I hold you? —All of it, is entirely due to that.”

Close enough to feel each other’s breaths, Rem’s smile softly grasped Subaru’s heart like an invisible hand.

He couldn't move. Not even a twitch. Reaching around his back, her delicate hand clasped onto the hems of his clothes, tightly, tightly, so tightly as if to merge into one, she held him in her embrace.

Rem: "It must have been tough, Subaru-kun."

Subaru: "-----"

Rem: "All alone, taking all the pain onto yourself... It must have been hard, Subaru-kun."

Subaru: "-----Guh."

Rem: "You don't have to bear all that sadness anymore, it's alright."

With no words to answer her, Subaru desperately tried to keep everything from flooding out, while Rem's sweet whispers went on. Gently unravelling his heart, melting away his obstinacy.

Rem: "All of Subaru-kun's pain, grief, and weakness, all of it, Rem will bear it for you."

Subaru: "..."

Rem: "Everything Subaru-kun wants to protect, to fight for, to accomplish... Leave all of those to me."

Subaru: "..."

Rem: "There's no need for you to carry every single burden— You can leave them all to me. For now, just rest, and go to sleep."

Subaru: "...I, I."

Rem: "And let me see the Subaru-kun that I love once again."

Rem set her hand against Subaru's cheek and raised up his face, gazing directly into him.

Her lips tightened, as if with some hesitation, as she drew her face closer.

What was she doing? What would happen next? Even his lagging consciousness could understand.

So close, near enough to feel her breaths, the lovely girl's lips were approaching. It'd be fine if they overlapped, intertwined, drowned, melted, and merged with his, wouldn't it?

—Regardless of right and wrong, she would forgive him, wouldn't she?

Just how deeply had Rem's gentle words seeped into Subaru's heart?

His indeterminate emotions, his soul, agonizing over whether to reach for that helping hand, along with the entirety of this Subaru's existence was once again saved by the girl who knew everything about him.

To this powerless Subaru, Rem offered her hand.

To this brittle back of Subaru's, Rem offered her support.

To this foolish Subaru's journey, Rem offered her escort.

By so shamelessly, clingingly, relying on her so entirely— If that would guide to the correct answer, then...

Where was the point in struggling alone?

Worn to the core, lost without a footing, no longer sure where to turn his steps, perhaps he should, just, give up, everything, and yield—

Rem: "Giving up is easy."

Subaru: "——"

Rem: "But—"

Subaru: "——"

Rem: "—It doesn't suit you, Subaru-kun."

He heard a voice saying.

Rem: "—Subaru-kun?"

Puzzled, Rem asked in front of his eyes.

It was only natural, since just before their lips could meet, a hand was placed between them. The sweet sensation of entwining tongues that was supposed to have come grew distant, while a wavering, wounded glimmer flickered in Rem's eyes.

Watching this wavering glint through the gaps between his fingers, Subaru spoke.

Subaru: "—Who, are you?"

Rem: "Huh—?"

Subaru: "I just asked you. Who are you?"

Rem: "Subaru-kun, why're y... asking who, I..."

In front of Subaru's quiet question, Rem's throat seemed to choke up, unable to speak. The faint, wounded color in her eyes deepened, as her expression became marked by grief. No matter what, it tore at Subaru's heart to see this.

To distract himself from this feeling, he pressed his hand to his chest and bared his teeth.

Subaru: "When... I'm hopeless at the end of my rope, seriously wishing that someone'll do something, thinking maybe it's impossible and about to give up... you would come to me. I seriously believed that."

Rem: "——"

Subaru: "If you were there, you would console me, comfort me, while I sat there stuck hugging my knees... I believed that."

Rem: "——"

Subaru: "Just like this, you'd listen to my whining, let me spew out all my whimpers, watch me cry until I wring my tears dry..."

Rem: "——"

Subaru: "—And then, you'd tell me to stand up."

The delicate touch of her fingers, the up-close warmth of her skin, and the immensity of her love, Natsuki Subaru remembered with all his body and soul.

And so, he could tell, without a doubt— that this Rem before his eyes was an impostor.

Subaru: “She would never say «rest for now».”

Rem “———”

Subaru: “She would never say «give up and leave it all to me».”

Rem: “———”

Subaru: “A girl who loves me, who’s loved by me, who’s kind to me, who’s head over heels for me— who’s strict and uncompromising with me, more than anyone else in this world, THAT is Rem!”

Springing to his feet, Subaru barked as he backed away from the Rem before his eyes.

Still on her knees, Rem looked up to Subaru without a word. Even now, he felt like he could drown in the sadness of her expression that was brought about by his rejection.

Rem: “No, you’re wrong. Subaru-kun, listen to me! I... That’s not what I meant. It was just, I couldn’t stand seeing Subaru-kun suffering like this... That’s why... I just wanted you to forget the pain and get some rest, that’s all!”

Subaru: “I’d let you see my weakness. I’d let you see my frailty. I’d let you see what a hopeless, worthless bastard I am— But I would never let you see me giving up.”

“Subaru is a hero”, that was what Rem had told him.

And so, Natsuki Subaru had resolved to become Rem’s hero.

Ever since they exchanged that promise, Subaru had decided—

—That in this life, in this world, the only place where Natsuki Subaru would show his weakness, was in front of Rem.

Only in front of Rem, who despite knowing Subaru's weakness still expected him to be strong, would he expose his own feeble self.

Not Emilia, not Beatrice, he would let no one see it except Rem.

Subaru: "My weakness belongs to Rem. She accepts and shields my weakness, and in exchange, I will hold down any thoughts of giving up, and never let it out."

Rem: "-----"

Subaru: "So fuck off, you fake— And don't fucking coddle me wearing my Rem's face and voice!"

Firmly declaring this, Subaru jabbed out his fist at Rem— at the impostor.

In front of Subaru's pronouncement, the listener was at a loss for words. Keeping her face downcast, softly, and quietly, she stood up,

Rem?: "B—but this is, not... what, she, told... me?"

Subaru: "ah...?"

Slanting her head and swaying her blue hair, the impostor stuttered out her words.

Hearing this, Subaru let out a voice of doubt—

Subaru: "-----"

Before his eyes, the girl's image seemed to blur as Rem's figure turned vague. A storm of television static drowned out his vision, and, following the momentary hijacking of the world, there was now another person standing in that same spot.

—Someone he had never seen before.

Her pink hair stretching halfway down her back, her bearing was gentle— or rather, timid. The girl's features were attractive, but nothing about it came across as outstandingly beautiful. It was more of an ordinary, commonplace kind of cuteness.



Illustration from Volume 12, coloring by Setowi ([source](#))

Wearing a white, long-sleeved robe, her hands were hiding inside her sleeves as she held them against her cheeks, watching Subaru nervously.

Subaru: “Who are... you?”

Carmilla: “I—I’m the Witch of Lust... Carmilla... you know? N—nice to meet... you.”

Hearing the girl— Carmilla’s reply, Subaru inadvertently swallowed his breath. She just called herself the Witch of Lust. Which means,

Subaru: “So this strange, inexplicable space... is inside Echidna’s dream?”

Carmilla: “Yes... and no... I guess. Echidna-chan is, watching, the Trial... And the Trial itself is, kind of, like, a dream... Mm... Yeah.”

Subaru: “That’s kind of missing the point, but no, even before that...”

Carmilla’s manner of speech was getting on Subaru’s nerves. Naturally, seeing Subaru’s gaze grow harsh, Carmilla immediately started shivering and hugging her head.

Carmilla: “P—please don’t hi... hit me...”

Subaru: “I won’t do anything like that. I won’t, but... what were you trying to do earlier?”

Carmilla: “Earlie... r?”

Subaru: “Appearing in front of me, pretending to be Rem! Is that what your power is supposed to be!?”

All the Witches bearing the name of a sin seem to possess some sort of special Authority. Assuming the Witch of Lust was no exception, she should have an Authority as well. If her transformation earlier was her Authority, then—

Subaru: “Well, I guess compared to what the other Witches can do, transformation is a pretty orthodox ability...”

Carmilla: “I—I didn’t, tr—transform... though? I—I, just, looked, to you, like someone, else... b—because... that’s, who, you wanted, to see... that’s all?”

Subaru: “What?”

Carmilla: “I, mean... I, didn’t, even, want to, meet you... E—Echidna-chan, asked me, to... And lied, to me, too...”

Carmilla’s mutters were exacerbating Subaru’s annoyance. The way she spoke, the way she shifted her glances, and the way she looked down whenever she sensed his gaze, all irritated him to no end. That whimpering tone, and those sulking complaints, the hell is her problem?

Not only was nothing she tried to say getting through, she could not know how treasured a thing for Subaru she had just stomped all over.

Irritated. Aggravated. He wanted to scream at her just so she’d understand.

Subaru: “You... Do you even know what you just did...?”

Carmilla: “Echidna-chan, she... s—said, I just had to spoil, you... a little, and it’ll all be, fine... Even, though... I—I didn’t want to, I told her.”

Subaru: “Listen to me...!!”

Carmilla: “E—everyone... is ganging up, on, me, p—p—p—picking on me... like, this. Echidna-chan is, d—doing it, too. You’re all, so... so mean.”

Subaru: “DON’T YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT LISTEN TO ME MEANS—!!??”

Screaming, Subaru felt all the air being wrenched from his lungs as he expelled that scraping shout. He felt it, but the incinerating rage burning through his body erased that thought from his mind.

Suffocation was nothing compared to this irritation clawing at his chest.

He wanted to jam her sniveling, stuttering, whimpering mouth shut, and blast her with all the rage and agony inside him so she’d understand what she had j—

????: “—Any more of that, your life would be in danger.”

Subaru: “———Ugh!?”

That instant, Subaru heard a voice whispering into his ear, pulling him back to his senses.

The very same moment, the pain of being deprived of oxygen up to the point of asphyxiation struck him, along with the dry soreness of his continually wide-open eyes.

Subaru: “Aah— A, aah?”

???: “These were drastic measures, but I’m glad to see you back— When facing Carmilla, Lust’s Faceless Goddess, people tend to forget to breathe. Ultimately, even their hearts stop beating.”

Subaru: “Egh, haaa, guh, tch... Haaaaa, haaaaaaaaa.”

Spitting out the choking saliva, having fallen to his hands and knees, Subaru’s consciousness was strobing.

But the voice had entered his ears, and its meaning delivered to his brain.

And so, Subaru wiped off his lips with his sleeve as he looked up at the most probable culprit behind this prank, and, baring his teeth,

Subaru: “Just what, what were you plotting. Echidna.”

At the receiving end of Subaru’s hateful gaze, the white-haired Witch softly stroked her hair, and all-so-naturally rested her elbows on the table,

Echidna: “Isn’t it obvious? —I am a Witch. I’m plotting something nefarious, of course.”

She said, smiling.

Arc 4 Chapter 74 - The Witch's Plan and Proposal

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 12, Chapter 6 “The Witches’ Tea Party”, Parts 1-2

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#)

Panting from asphyxiation, Subaru belatedly noticed that his hands were on a green field of grass.

From the ground where his limbs landed rose the thick scent of grass scraping across his nostrils. Like that of a meadow bathed in sunlight after the rain, the choking fragrance of nature gently wrapped all around him.

He turned his head and saw Echidna straight before him.

She was, as always, on the small hillock in the middle of the plains, seated in a chair at the table, waiting for her tea party's guest— for Subaru.

As always. Yes, just as always.

Echidna: “I’m sure there are all sorts things you want to say and ask me... But first, how about taking a seat and having a cup of tea?”

Subaru: “...If you, consider what you just did to me, do you think I’d just cordially sit in that chair... and go along with your tea party?”

Echidna: “I do. Compared to losing yourself to instinct and senseless rage, you are the kind who’s more likely to dress yourself in rational, cold calculation. Now, rather than distancing yourself from me, there are far more benefits in holding a profitable conversation... Isn’t that what you’ve concluded in your heart?”

Subaru: “———”

Faced with Subaru's suppressed fury, Echidna's carefree bearing remained unfazed. Calling down to him from above, as if mocking Subaru's all-too-obvious bluff, the words struck true while Subaru could neither affirm nor deny them.

Except, the thing that she had trampled over was not so cheap that he'd concede so easily.

Subaru: "Echidna... just tell me you didn't mean to."

Echidna: "Hm?"

Subaru: "Just now... That trick with the Witch of Lust, tell me you didn't mean for it to happen. Tell me, that you made a mistake, go on say it."

Echidna: "..."

Subaru: "Say it was unavoidable. Say you didn't anticipate it, that it shouldn't have gone down that way. Say it. If you just tell me that... I won't blame you for it."

What Echidna said was right. If Subaru wanted to proceed, he would need her knowledge and help.

But, what was unforgivable remained unforgivable still. Echidna had used the Witch of Lust to trespass into a precious and inviolable place inside Subaru—his Sanctuary. That much was certain. And so, for Subaru, this was the necessary requirement before he could forgive Echidna and hold a meaningful conversation with her.

Echidna: "...And I was wondering what you'd say."

In that moment, she must have understood Subaru's inner weakness and obstinance.

Spilling that inadvertent mutter, Echidna turned her gaze toward Subaru, who was biting his lips, waiting for her reply. She leisurely fiddled her white hair, and,

Echidna: "Then, as you wish, that was just the Witch of Lust running amok. I tried to stop her, but she wouldn't listen. Taking advantage of the Trial, she tried to seduce you by unveiling the part of you that you least wanted to be touched, and with it, drown you."

Subaru: "-----"

Echidna: "It came close, but you still managed to escape her spell through your own strength. Then, having failed her seduction, when Carmilla let down her guard, I took back control and summoned you to my Citadel. You could say that it was by a stroke of luck that we could now meet here, face-to-face."

Subaru: "-----"

Echidna: "...Now, suppose I told you all that, would you be satisfied?"

Swiftly, Echidna lined up everything Subaru had wanted to hear, only to betray her own words in the end.

Without saying a thing, Subaru looked upwards, as if to put Echidna out of his gaze.

Subaru: "...What were you trying to do, goading on a Witch like that."

Echidna: "Carmilla didn't tell you? What she did was to save you, after the Trial had all but abraded away your heart."

Subaru: "That... That couldn't have been the Witch of Lust's intention. If what she said was true, then that was only my selfish weakness wanting to hear Rem say those things to me. The Witch of Lust had no reason to be kind to me... Those were your instructions, weren't they?"

Echidna: "So you've already deduced this much, out of such little information... In that case, I suppose there's no point making excuses."

Casually, Echidna discarded the act with a shrug. Then, she brought her teacup to her lips, and tilted it with a sip,

Echidna: "It's as you suspected, sending Carmilla to you and having her pretend to be the girl in your heart were all by my instructions. Though, the imperfect outcome and the fact that it was seen through is more of a problem on Carmilla's end than mine."

Subaru: "—Why... would you do that?"

Echidna: "Hearing it straight-out is probably going to make you angry— It was the most efficient method, and the one most likely to succeed."

Without apology, Echidna went on as Subaru's expression vanished.

Echidna: "Even I didn't expect you to get so hung up on the Second Trial. Above all, the fact that its contents hit you this hard was, in all honesty, something I couldn't have imagined until I saw it with my own eyes."

Subaru: "-----"

Echidna: "Oh my, I do wish you'd overlook me peeping in on your Trials? I'm sure I've already told you after the First Trial, that these are Trials set up by a Witch? Even if the product is a bit mean-spirited, I still wouldn't like to have this and that said about me."

Subaru: "...Get on with it."

Echidna: "Anyway, while watching you face the Trial from the sidelines, I had a thought— If you went on challenging the Trials like this, you'd be worn to the core before long..."

That wasn't an exaggeration. In fact, it wasn't far from the truth.

Subaru wasn't so aloof to what was happening to him that he'd try to refute her here.

The Second Trial, the presents that were not to be, and the scenes, events, and tragedies he was forced to witness were more than enough to shatter his hubris, stubbornness, and delusions.

Echidna: "And so I intervened. Even though, being worn to the core is also a result in itself, I like to experiment with everything through trial and error. My curiosity is insatiable and strives endlessly to produce conclusions. To satisfy my insatiable Greed, I seek out any and all outcomes— The one in which challenging the Trial breaks you, is no exception."

Subaru: "So then why did you intervene? If me breaking is just another outcome you seek, you could've just left me there. If the result was that was all I amounted to after all... you would've been satisfied too, wouldn't you?"

Echidna: "I did have a mind to just accept it as another result... I did, but that doesn't mean I shouldn't do something to produce the result I wanted."

Subaru: "What...?"

Hounded by Subaru's questioning, Echidna dropped her tone as she replied.

Hearing this, for the first time today, Subaru furrowed his brows for a reason other than rage. Carefully scrutinizing her words and forming the semblance of a meaning, if he wasn't mistaken, then,

Subaru: "It was to reject the outcome where I'd be worn to nothing... That's why you set up that situation. Is that what you're saying?"

Echidna: "...And as a result, I trespassed onto a territory that was precious to you, I have no excuses for that. So, if you want to shower me with insults, I will resignedly accept them. Your anger is justified, and it was wrong of me to be so inconsiderate. That's all there is to it."

Setting her cup on the table, Echidna gazed straight down towards Subaru at the foot of the hill. Completely devoid of the playful caprice of before, the Witch of Greed now faced him with the entirety of her sincerity.

Her attitude, her stance, and her words all overwhelmed him.

All of a sudden, the rage and distrust towards Echidna that were occupying his chest only moments ago now seemed horrifically egotistical and selfish.

The truth is— unable to forget her hand in what happened earlier, Subaru was still reluctant to accept Echidna's help, but then, what would his heart become without it?

Laying on the cold floor of the Tomb, his heart, shattered, crushed to dust, left in a darkness without the faintest light, and there, erased to nothing. It wasn't hard to imagine.

He couldn't go as far as to thank her. But nor did he feel that she deserved his rage and abuse— That much, was his emotional compromise.

Subaru: "——"

Standing up without a word, Subaru patted off the grass on his clothing and made his way up the hill.

Seated in her chair, a flicker of pain flashed through Echidna's eyes as she watched Subaru's approach. What words would he pummel her with once he got here? It seemed that not even this centuries-old Witch could tell.

The Incarnation of the Thirst for Knowledge. The Witch of Greed. To see such an adversary's expression twinge at his approach still gave Subaru's heart some small relief.

Echidna: "—Ah."

In front of Echidna's soft cry of surprise, Subaru pulled out a chair and sat down opposite her. Though he had no intention of bringing that teacup to his lips, this was his way of show his willingness to talk. While Echidna looked on with a hint of unease, Subaru rested his cheek in his hand and turned his face away,

Subaru: "I'm not in the mood for Dona Tea... But I would like to have that profitable conversation with you."

Swallowing down his unbearable emotions, Subaru summoned up the magnanimity to reply.

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Subaru: "So in the end, what is the Second Trial?"

Keeping his cheek rested against his palm, Subaru asked without looking at Echidna.

On the other end, Echidna shifted her chair forward in order to enter Subaru's field of view,

Echidna: "Well, what do you think it was?"

Subaru: "You're not... trying to confuse me, are you? Is that your way of telling me I'm asking too much? Putting me on the spot like that."

Echidna: "I'm not as mean-spirits as to do that. I did do something to upset you, after all. I just wanted to check if we can still speak on friendly terms, and also to hear your opinion while we're at it."

Those words would've made anyone feel embarrassed. If Subaru had come into this conversation in a normal state of mind, he certainly would've been discomposed and gotten stuck on his words.

But, in his current state of mind, there was no way he would give her the reaction she wanted. Instead, Subaru spilled a small sigh as his reply,

Subaru: “The Trial’s topic was to witness a present that was not to be. That was the premise, as well the subject of the scenes it showed me... I’m guessing this present that was not to be would be a present that would have existed if I had made a different choice along the way, right?”

One way to think about it is like what happens in Visual Novels. It is a game in which the player makes decisions in key points of the story, causing the paths to diverge. On a grander scale, one could even say that life itself is kind of unfolding like one gigantic game. People must constantly face choices and make decisions based on their individual will—all the while trying to aim for a certain potential thread in the world: that would be precisely what life is.

Echidna: “By definition, they are worlds which you should never have been able to witness. Who knows? You might find that you are happier in that world than in the actual present, then you might come to regret, «Why didn’t I do that back then?». Or otherwise, that world might be more wretched than the actual present, and then, perhaps you’d say to yourself, «Thank god I didn’t do that»— Ultimately, the Second Trial is to witness presents other than the present you have chosen, and to determine whether or not you could correctly affirm the only genuine present.”

Following on Subaru’s words, Echidna succinctly summed up the Second Trial. It wasn’t too far from what Subaru had imagined. Except for the part where Subaru had to go through that deeply penetrating ordeal.

Subaru: “—So, those alternate presents I saw, do they really exist?”

Echidna: “...”

Subaru: “Every time I die, I’d Return by Death. So I’ve never seen what happens after I die... Until now, I’ve never even considered the possibility of the world continuing after my death... No, actually, it’s that I’ve been trying not to.”

Well, of course.

Subaru only Returns by Death because the world was already beyond saving. In order to break through the deadlock and save everyone he held dear, Subaru had believed that by Returning by Death he could reach the perfect future— Or so he told himself, so he could endure the sensation of constantly spending his life.

The existence of worlds beyond his death would upturn that premise from its roots.

If only to set his mind at ease, he must convince himself that there were no worlds he left behind, and that the people in those lost worlds had in fact been saved. And so,

Subaru: "After my deaths... do the worlds continue on...? When my choices caused the world to diverge, when I left those unsalvageable worlds behind... Was everyone I failed to protect still inside them...?"

Echidna: "-----"

Subaru: "What is it, Echidna... Please, answer me."

Having lost the option of avoiding looking at her with his eyes, Subaru leaned forward in his seat and turned a pleading gaze towards Echidna.

Echidna didn't say a word, but, bathed in Subaru's gaze, she touched her chin as if in thought, and then closed her eyes.

Echidna: "There is, one thing I should clear up about the Trials."

Subaru: "..."

Echidna: "The present in the Second Trial is no more than a phenomenon which allows you to witness an imagined world. The challenger taking the Trial... That's you, in this case. By projecting off of the details of your memories, the Memories of the World draws on everything that makes up your surroundings, the people, the world, the atmosphere, and even the Mana, and, assembling them with necessary information from the past, present, and future, a new present is created."

Subaru: "..."

Echidna: "Meaning that is entirely a well-made unreality. The degree of their reconstruction is on an entirely different dimension from your self-produced imaginings and delusions, and as a fake reality those things would potentially occur. But they're artificial realities from start-to-finish. If questioning whether they really happened, the answer is not affirmative."

Subaru: "Th—that means..."

Echidna: "However."

Seeing hope in Echidna's explanation, Subaru lifted his head. But just as he thought he saw the light, Echidna held up her palm and stopped him,

Echidna: "The precise mechanisms of your Return by Death are unclear. It's almost certain that the one facilitating your Return by Death is the Witch of Envy, but the issue of how the Witch of Envy causes you to Return by Death leaves questions unending. Perhaps, it is a power that rewinds the world upon your death. Or perhaps, each time, it is achieved by reaching into another, parallel world and pulling out another you, and with it, overwrites your existence."

Subaru: "Aah..."

Echidna: "If we assume it to be the latter, then parallel worlds do indeed exist, and, after your death, those worlds would continue on even without you."

Subaru: "S—so how do we know for sure..."

Echidna: "—We don't."

With a shake of her head, Echidna mercilessly cut off Subaru's trembling words.

Subaru's eyes opened wide while his mouth hung open without making a sound. Echidna turned him a sympathizing gaze as she tapped her finger on the edge of the table.

Echidna: "If there is one way to confirm it, it would be to ask the Witch of Envy herself. But I'm sure you know from experience how difficult that would be?"

Echidna must be referring to Subaru's memories of the first time he truly faced the Witch of Envy. Leaving the Tomb after the end of the tea party, there, he found the Witch of Envy. Stealing Emilia's body, tearing Garfiel to shreds, and engulfing the Sanctuary in shadow, it was a monster in the truest sense— Suddenly, he remembered the doubts surrounding that thing's appearance.

Subaru: "Ri... ght... Echidna. Before, after the tea party ended... outside, I saw the Witch in the Sanctuary. What was... that? Just what was that?"

Echidna: "I thought it'd be obvious? That was the Witch of Envy. Though, that imitation is nothing compared to the real thing. The fleshly vessel it had chosen was immature, and more importantly, not a

single one of its seals had been undone. With its Witch Factor in a deficient state, there was no way it could have displayed the same power it had in its heyday.”

Subaru: “That was still nothing compared to its heyday...?”

Disposing of the beastified Garfiel like he was nothing and slaughtering everyone without receiving a scratch, that monster was still nothing compared the true Witch of Envy.

Four-hundred years ago, in the age when the actual Witch ran rampant, what hell must it have been?

Echidna: “Just as you imagined, the trigger for her appearance was the tea party. Not even that thing could prevent you from violating the taboo in here. And so, driven mad with envy, yet unable to vent it inside, it took out its rage on the external world, exploding into a rampage wreaking havoc in its wake.”

Subaru: “And you knew that it’d fucking happen?”

Echidna: “Not exactly. It was the first time, after all. Being the first time, it was only after it actually happened that I could come up with my hypothesis. I can’t derive conclusions without first seeing it happen, in that sense, as the Witch of Greed, I’m not that different from you all.”

Subaru: “-----”

Subaru was at loss for words to see that Echidna’s spectator’s stance showing no signs of collapsing. There was no point in reproaching her for it. But even though he knew this, he still couldn’t quite shake the vexation.

If only she had felt like it, if she had felt like helping Subaru, then maybe---

Echidna: “I doubt there was any great reason why the one you loved was chosen as the vessel. Although there would be a certain affinity when it’s another half-elf, I think the biggest reason could only be envy.”

Subaru: “Envy...?”

Echidna: “For a Witch who wants to be the sole subject of your thoughts, is it really so hard to believe that she’d hate and seek to destroy the recipient of your impassioned affections?”

Loving someone to the point of madness also meant demanding that person to love her back in return. As long as that love wasn't directed at her, she'd go to insane lengths to make sure that it was. Such was the volatile lunacy known as love.

Perhaps the Witch of Envy was precisely the incarnation of that behavior.

Echidna: "All the questions puzzling your mind, are ones which only the Witch of Envy could answer."

Subaru: "-----"

Echidna: "You can mull over them endlessly, but, in all honesty, I doubt you will ever reach an answer. Not about why she pursued you back then, nor about the presents that may or may not exist."

Subaru: "Th... at's..."

To Subaru, that would be far too cruel a reality. He wanted to hear it clearly refuted. To be told that the worlds beyond his death never existed. Or if not, then at least he wanted to hear it outright. That so many had been sacrificed due to his conceit.

Whichever the answer, Subaru would have taken it as his admonition, his creed, his reminder to never forget, and though he'd grit his teeth, shed tears of blood and cry out from his very soul, he would turn his steps forward.

—But for the answer to be "there is no answer", isn't that just far too cruel?

Was he to live, without confirmation or denial, leaving the fate of worlds in this indeterminate limbo?

To go on without knowing whether his steps were his own. Whether he had abandoned what he had abandoned. Whether his sins were sins. Was this to be his punishment?

Were Natsuki Subaru's crimes so great that no one could ever forgive him?

No one was capable of passing judgement on Subaru. No one could condemn him, either. He already understood this.

—But was even Subaru himself to be denied that right?

Echidna: "I think it's harsh. But I also think all you could possibly do is rationalize."

As Subaru was stricken into speechlessness, Echidna addressed him with these words.

He slowly shifted his head and turned his vacant gaze onto Echidna. Taking in Subaru's gaze, Echidna swallowed a breath, and, with a serious expression,

Echidna: "In more extreme terms, the Second Trial is to accept the true present as the only present that is, while separating out all the others as utterly unreachable worlds."

Subaru: "-----"

Echidna: "I'm sure it must be hard, since, compared to other challengers, you have far more reason to believe that these realities truly exist. But still, it's time that you changed perspective."

Subaru: "Changed... perspective...?"

Echidna: "Your choices may have indeed left many sacrifices in their wake. And among those you left behind, there must be plenty that are beyond retrieval. But to spend your life counting those you have lost and left behind... would be a miserable resolution. Futile. And painful, don't you think?"

Subaru: "If I wanted empty idealism, I wouldn't have come to you... Don't know why I have to say this, but did you actually think some run-of-the-mill counseling advice was going to help me get through this...?"

Echidna's words were pleasant, and comforting. If the wound was shallow, or the crime light, or if it had just been the matter of some causal occurrence, then maybe it would have helped.

Or perhaps, if he had merely wanted to feel saved, he may have been capable of that change in perspective. But,

Subaru: "It still doesn't change the fact that everything I've done and everything I couldn't do hadn't changed reality by one bit... That everyone I sacrificed, believing that those worlds would cease to exist, would amount to nothing more but a piling of bodies..."

Echidna: "...That's true."

Subaru: "Then how am I supposed to be okay with this? How am I supposed to forgive myself? When you tried offering me a hand, I slapped it away. That's because I didn't want to be saved by a counterfeit Rem. I will definitely retrieve the real Rem in the end, one way or another— But."

Pausing for a breath, Subaru's face twisted in anguish,

Subaru: "—When I do... would she really be the same Rem I had set out to save?"

Echidna: "——"

Subaru: "Without an answer, my heart has nowhere to turn... And here you are telling me that I don't have to be like this, that all I have to do is rationalize it...?"

Echidna: "——"

Subaru: "Rather than count those I couldn't save, I should live counting the ones I did save... Is that what you're telling me?"

What Echidna tried to tell him was that there was hope if he only looked ahead. For Subaru, those words may have become a beacon.

—But the darkness into which he had fallen was not so shallow that he could consider it as such.

Subaru: "With this mediocre idealism... you're telling me... to just fight...?"

Echidna: "—I am."

Subaru: "——"

Echidna: "That is what I am telling you."

While he was shoving aside all words of comfort and crying from the depths of despair, Echidna said this to Subaru.

Speaking slowly, pronouncing each syllable, Echidna looked Subaru straight in the eyes and told him.

Echidna: "Rather than count the multitudes you might not have saved, you should count all those you have saved. I have seen the roads you've taken to get here."

Subaru: "I, what... what would y... about me..."

Echidna: "I have seen you doing your utmost, striving with all of your soul to forge your own path up to now. And so, I can say this. Indeed, I can."

Subaru: "-----"

Echidna: "Of all the paths you have taken until now, not even one has been wasted. No one has the right to tell you that your utmost was not enough. It was only by throwing in everything you had that you have reached this moment— That is something to be proud of."

Echidna's sincere words struck at Subaru's emptied chest. Something resounded in its hollow interior—but it was not enough. Those words could not compel him to stand.

Even if he was told that he should be proud, the fact remained that he had abandoned and lost too much. Things he should have been able to change. Things that would have gone differently if it had been anyone else besides Subaru. But, because that person was Subaru, there were so many that could not be saved.

That was Subaru's crime. Subaru's transgression. The sin which Subaru must accept and atone for.

Subaru: "There's no one who can forgive me."

Echidna: "Then I will forgive you. I, who know everything about you."

Subaru: "There's no one who can judge me."

Echidna: "Then I will judge you. I, who know all of your sins."

Subaru: "—There's no one who can validate me."

Echidna: "If you cannot validate yourself, then allow me to invalidate the self you cannot forgive."

Subaru: "-----"

Echidna: "If you cannot accept your sins, then leave it to me to deny them."

For each of Subaru's words, Echidna had one to strike it down.

Why was this Witch so insistent on denying Subaru's sins?

Why was this Witch so unrelenting about wiping that darkness from Subaru's heart?

Subaru: "Why... are you... trying so hard to help me?"

Echidna: "...A—a—asking a girl to say that kind of thing is just plain mean, you know."

Echidna, who had not faltered once until now, was, for the first time, stuttering her words.

Then, with a slight blush on her cheeks, Echidna cleared her throat, and,

Echidna: "—Will you forge a Contract with me, Natsuki Subaru?"

Her voice was quiet, yet suggestive of her strong volition.

Subaru blinked, letting the words seep into his brain but still needing more time to comprehend them.

Subaru: "Con... tract...?"

Echidna: "Yes, a Contract. A formal Contract with the Witch of Greed— Are you interested in tying one?"

Subaru: "We for... Say, if we forged this Contract, what happens then?"

Echidna: "It's simple— from now on, whenever you meet an obstacle you cannot surmount, I will face the wall and ponder with you. Whenever you wish to hear someone's words, I will endeavor to give you the testimony you desire. Whenever you feel close to being crushed by the weight of your sins, I will clear those crushing sins together with you."

Saying this in a single breath, a bashful smile rose on Echidna's face,

Echidna: "Will you forge this Contract with me?"

Subaru: "...But you're dead... so you can't influence reality anymore, right?"

Echidna: "I believe my reach has already far exceeded that of the dead? I suppose it's a bit late for me to admit this, but better late than never... That is, if you can forgive me."

Holding her hand to her chest, inclining her head as she spoke, Echidna's words reverberated upon Subaru's eardrums. The vibration passed into his body, bringing a gradual warmth that followed his coursing blood and pervaded throughout his body.

Sensation returned to his numbing fingers. His parched tongue regained some of its moisture and mobility, and he could feel his thirsting eyes that had forgotten to blink being quenched by something wet and hot.

Her offered hand, her proposition, her proposal, her pledge of assistance left him at a loss as to how to answer.

Just when his vow to go on struggling seemed to have all but lost its meaning, the Witch pledged to be there to support him.

Echidna: "I don't mean to brag, but I am rather confident in the volume of my knowledge. I can prepare countermeasures for just about any problem you might encounter, and no matter how absurd a situation threatens to befall you, unlike your peers, there is no need to go to such pains to persuade me. And, most of all, I can comprehend your Return by Death."

Subaru: "Are you trying to hit me with a surprise fast-lipped sales pitch?"

Echidna: "As the requesting party, I do think it's only natural for me to lay out all the benefits of sealing this Contract with me. And if it has managed to put some ease into your heart, then all the better, don't you think?"

Making use of Subaru's words, Echidna took even those as a part of her pitch. Seeing the Witch this way, Subaru couldn't help but loosen his cheeks into a smile.

Suddenly feeling the air peacefully flowing out of his lungs, Subaru sighed. Bathed in the meadow's gentle wind, he leaned his back into the chair and looked up to the sky. In the blue, artificial sky, he could see white clouds floating.

Whenever he gets stuck, whenever he is lost without an answer, whenever he is facing against impossible odds.

—If he could sit here under this azure sky, and trade words with her in search of a solution...

Subaru: "Maybe, it wouldn't be so bad..."

Echidna: "—You mean...?"

Her chair squeaking as she stood, inadvertently clenching her hands into fists, Echidna looked down at Subaru. But, noticing Subaru's gaze looking back at her with his back still inclined against his chair, Echidna's face suddenly changed color as if embarrassed by her own actions,

Echidna: "Ah, no... Hmm, but, if you absolutely must insist, then I guess sealing such a Contract isn't entirely out of the..."

Subaru: "It's a bit too late to cover it up, isn't it? I mean, you were the one who asked for... Ugh, nevermind, saying it just feels incredibly crude at this point."

Echidna was the one proposing it, but she had done so to save Subaru's heart. To put it plainly, it was a Witch's kindness. The fact that she didn't make him cling and beg must have simply been the Witch's consideration for Subaru.

No matter where he was, no matter who it was, was he always going to wind up being saved like this?

Bouncing off the back of his chair to jolt himself forward, Subaru stood up.

Standing close enough to touch if he only reached out his hand, Echidna looked into Subaru's eyes that were now level with her own, a tinge of unease in her expression.

Even the Witch's minutest actions are cunning, he thought. But since he was the one being saved, he was surely in no position to complain.

Subaru: "So... how does one seal a Contract?"

Echidna: "—To seal a formal Contract, you and I must be connected by a path between us. I will take care of the details... But for now, your palm."

Echidna held up her right hand with her white palm facing towards Subaru.

"Here, put your palm against mine", was probably what it meant.

Feeling somewhat dumbstruck, watching the Witch across from him failing to keep the glee from escaping onto her lips, “Haa”, he spilled a quiet sigh,

Subaru: “Now, hopefully things’ll finally start changing...”

Filled with great expectations of the future, he placed his palm onto hers, and—

Impact.

A crashing boom rang out as the cup-bearing table beside him burst into a thousand pieces.

The impact that shattered the table passed into the ground, birthing a crater in its wake as the rumble of the quaking earth jolted Subaru into squawking in shock.

???: “—I’m putting a stop to this Contract.”

Striking her fist into the ground, proclaiming this in her magnificent voice, was a blonde-haired, blue-eyed girl—

—The Witch of Wrath, peering her eyes over the two, smoldering with furious rage.

Arc 4 Chapter 75 - That Person

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 12, Chapter 6 “The Witches’ Tea Party”, Part 3

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#), [Part 4](#), [Part 5](#)

Stumbling back from the impact as if he had a rug pulled from under him, Subaru widened his eyes at the blonde-haired girl glaring back at him. Her blue eyes teeming with exorbitant rage and her beautiful face colored with a crimson hue, it was the Witch— Minerva.

Taking her sharp gaze off the petrified Subaru, she turned to the entirely unfazed Echidna, standing opposite him.

Minerva: “I’ll say it again, this stops now. I will not allow this kind of Contract.”

Echidna: “...Hm. Now isn’t this... quite an unexpected development.”

It was a sentiment too familiar to be hostility, and too violent to be called rage. Standing in the crater she had made, single-mindedly directing this at Echidna, Minerva folded her arms, hoisting up her ample breasts while biting her lip.

Echidna: “Surely— you should understand the significance of a Contract with a Witch. That you have interrupted it regardless would mean... Could it be, that you also wish to seal a Contract with him yourself? This wouldn’t be a case of sour grapes, now would it?”

Minerva: “Can’t you tell from my fury that it’s nothing so docile? I’m furious. I’m incensed. I’m so upset I’m ready to explode.”

In front of Echidna’s dodging jests, Minerva shot back with the shade of red deepening on her cheeks. Tears pooled in her eyes from the intensity of her emotions while her face pouted like a sulking child.

Her childish face entirely at odds with her voluptuous figure— Subaru couldn't help but be intrigued to see such a character in the flesh. After all,

Subaru: "What... are you doing here?"

Minerva: "What. Am I not allowed to be here?"

Subaru: "Well, no. That's not... But... I mean, Echidna's right here."

Saying this, Subaru pointed at Echidna as Minerva puffed up her cheeks in displeasure. Not seeing his point, Minerva tilted her head, while Echidna, apparently catching on, lightly clasped her hands together and nodded,

Echidna: "Ah, I think I know why you're confused— You're surprised to see another Witch manifesting while I am still here, correct?"

Subaru: "Y—yeah. I mean, since I've always met the Witches one-on-one... I thought they kinda had to take your place when they appear. But..."

Minerva: "And she never said we can't appear at the same time, I bet. That just sounds like the kind of prank this unkind Witch would pull."

Huffing in rage, Minerva easily smacked down Subaru's protests. Muttering "Seriously...?" under his breath, Subaru looked at Echidna. But, in front of Subaru's gaze and Minerva's address, Echidna made no effort to deny it.

Echidna: "I wouldn't want you to misunderstand. Calling the other Witches here is quite a taxing and risky thing to do. There's a chance they might even wrest away my control over this place, or, even if they don't, it is still incredibly exhausting to manifest beings as powerful as them."

Subaru: "That's... why? —No, but, you..."

Echidna: "I've never once lied about this. I can assure you that much."

With that single incisive statement, Echidna sliced through Subaru's faltering words.

It was true. Searching through his memories, Echidna had never said anything about this present situation that would constitute a lie. It was only Subaru's imagination going off on its own when he was presented with this phenomenon.

So, in the end, technically Echidna hadn't actually deceived him, but,

Echidna: "I just didn't want you to know that other Witches can manifest as they wish, and have them take you from me."

Subaru: "H—huh?"

Echidna: "To me, you are the first guest I've had in a very long time. Conversing with you had thrilled me in ways I've rarely ever been thrilled, whether it be before or after my death. If I told you I simply wanted to have you here, all to myself, would you berate me for my shallowness?"

Subaru: "——"

Echidna: "I know I keep on saying this, but I am rather fond of you. And so, I didn't want your interest to shift onto other Witches more charming and more helpful than myself— Go on, you can laugh at me if you wish."

So this extreme, hideous desire to possess— was her reason for hiding it from him.

Quietly listening to Echidna's excuse without saying a word, Subaru wondered why she would have this obsession towards him. Just what about him warranted this kind of fixation?

It was the same with the Witch of Envy, and now Echidna, too. Just why would they—

Minerva: "You're way too easy to dupe, you know that!?"

Subaru: "—Dgah!?"

Just as his mind was sinking into thought, Subaru's head was bumped by a soft fist from behind.

He turned around holding his head and found Minerva right behind him. She took the hand he was holding against his head, and, in one fluid motion, she twisted his arm and flipped him onto the ground.

Subaru: “Oa, aah! Wai— hurts hurts hurts... or... not?”

Minerva: “When I directly touch anything living, no matter what action I take, it would be transformed into healing. I could punch with all my strength and it would close wounds, I could wrest you to the ground and it would cure you of your diseases, I could place you in a lock and it would fix of your shoulder-pains...!”

Subaru: “That... explains why my body’s not aching all over, but.”

While his body was savoring the full power of the Witch of Wrath, Subaru frantically twisted his neck to look at Minerva as she locked him in a hold.

Despite the creaking of his bones and the horribly-unnatural-looking directions his joints were being twisted in, instead of pain, all he felt was an incongruous warmth spreading throughout his body. This Witch, with the strange Authority to instill every action with restorative powers— Come to think of it, Subaru hadn’t had a single bad impression about her up to now, but,

Subaru: “What the hell are you trying to do...?”

Minerva: “If I didn’t do this, you would’ve been happily cajoled into getting all ready to sign a Contract with Echidna. This careless, braindead attitude of yours is really pissing me off!”

Echidna: “Cajole, makes it sound bad. I only remember explaining the benefits of sealing a Contract with me and working to reach a mutual understanding...”

Minerva: “It’s the way you make it sound like you’ve fulfilled your responsibility to explain that’s getting to me. You explained the benefits alright. You did... Then what about the inconvenient details that come with the Contract, you didn’t say a thing about those!”

In a fit of rage, Minerva angrily stomped down her foot. The place where her heel landed was exactly on Subaru’s butt, as he felt the inexplicable sensation of a heel driving into his rear while its force passed through him, crushing an indentation into the ground.

While feeling his bowel functions being somehow improved by this strike to his behind, to Subaru shock, he began to realize the meaning of Minerva’s words.

—It was true, that his conversation with Echidna hadn't touched on the detriments of the Contract at all. Just how was it that it took him so long notice it?

Subaru: "No, but... calling them detriments... It's not actually that serious, is it?"

Minerva: "«It won't be that bad», is that what you're thinking? You are taking Contracts way too lightly. Especially when the other person is a Witch— especially the one who, out of the seven Witches of Sins, has forged the most Contracts, interacted the most with humans, and meddled the most with the course of history. The Witch of Greed."

Echidna: "All those were my laurels in life... though it's true not every one of them would be what you'd call honorable. And, it is also true that sealing a Contract with me did not necessarily save all of them."

What Minerva put forth was something Subaru never knew about. Following on Minerva's words, Echidna insisted on her lack of any ill-will towards Subaru.

Stuck between the two as they asserted their stances, Subaru's head was at the peak of disarray. He didn't know whose words to believe.

Ever since Subaru got involved in the Trials inside the Tomb, his multiple meetings with Echidna and all the time they spent together deliberating over his worries had led him to consider her somewhat like a comrade-in-arms. And so, when she proposed to forge a Contract to formally seal their cooperation, a part of Subaru even felt relieved.

On the other hand, compared to the time he had spent with Echidna, he had had very few opportunities to speak with Minerva. Yet each time, it was when he was on the brink of collapse that she mercifully saved him with her mighty arms before exiting like a hurricane without demanding even a word of gratitude in return.

Minerva had no reason to deceive Subaru, so if it was a matter important enough for her to manifest herself to intercede, then there might be reason for him to carefully reconsider.

Or, actually, rather than pondering like this, he should first be asking this question. That is—

Subaru: "Echidna. If we seal this Contract... you'll have to get something in return, right?"

Echidna: "...Mhm, that's correct. Contracts require compensation. Just as I will offer you the knowledge you seek, you will present me with the compensation I desire."

Subaru: "Of course. Right— So, what do you want from me? If I enter a Contract with you, what will I need to give you?"

From here on, whenever he gets stuck in a hopeless deadlock and needs Echidna's help, what will he need to pay?

To his question, Echidna's cheeks softened into a smile.

Echidna: "Nothing you need to be so wary about. What I want from you is not so hard to give. In fact, since the compensation I seek is neither material, nor immaterially precious, you could say that mine is more than a fair offer."

Subaru: "—And what is it... that you want?"

Echidna: "It's simple— What you feel, what you think, what lingers within your heart, what you know, what you do, what you create, and all of the fruits you could call Unknown, born from your very existence, I want to relish... always."

Echidna's face blushed, like that of a young maiden with a crush.

The fruits you could call Unknown— that poetic phrasing made Subaru furrow his brows.

Subaru: "The hell's... that? You want me to hand over my feelings, my memories, my recollections, is that what you mean? In that case..."

Echidna: "Didn't I tell you? It's nothing so troubling. I just want to witness the sights you see, the melodies you hear, the stories you weave, all from a special box seat. All I want is to experience it. To be in a position to know the Unknowns you create. With that, and that alone, I will be satisfied."

To dispel Subaru's concerns, Echidna clearly stated her demands.

It was simply to watch Subaru walk his path. To see the same sights he sees. To know the feelings he feels, to know what he knows, and witness the results of his actions.

The Incarnation of the Thirst for Knowledge, the Witch bearing the crown of Greed, wanted only that.

Subaru: “You aren’t, lying to me, are you?”

Echidna: “Lying about the terms of a Contract would be absurd. As for myself, I pledge that I will never do anything to betray those words. I swear this on my life.”

Placing her hand on her chest, “Though, I am already dead.”, Echidna concluded with a quip.

Subaru could sense no deception in her words or behavior. Or perhaps, it was because he wanted to believe her.

Subaru: “Minerva. Since Echidna’s already said that... I think I’ll...”

???: “I—it’s all... true, but... she hasn’t, told you every, thing, h—has she?”

Just as Subaru asked Minerva to release him from her hold, this time, he heard another person’s voice addressing him. It was a voice he had heard only ten-odd minutes ago— a voice for which Subaru had absolutely no positive feelings for.

Subaru: “Carmilla... Witch of Lust!”

Carmilla: “Do... n’t... look at me... with those scary eyes. I, I’m... not even, doing any, thing... aw—awful...”

Subaru: “I was born with scary eyes. I’m not trying to make an especially intense expression or anything.”

With Subaru still held against the ground, in front of him stood Echidna and behind him was Minerva, the three of them forming a straight line, while, sitting on the grass a short distance away, was a pink-haired girl— Carmilla.

She timidly hid her face from Subaru’s gaze, and only now and then peeked over. Her attitude was irritating as always, but by consciously keeping his attention off her, he managed to avoid being captivated to a life-threatening degree. Then, he asked again,

Subaru: “But anyway, what were you talking about? I won’t complain about more Witches showing up at this point, but if there’s anyth...”

Carmilla: “E—Echidna-chan is... hiding lots and lots of things, you know...? She, isn’t lying, but... she’s hiding lots, and lots...”

Subaru: “Hiding... what...?”

Pondering over Carmilla’s words, Subaru imploringly looked towards Echidna. While Echidna turned to the newcomer, Carmilla, and narrowed one of her eyes,

Echidna: “And I was wondering why you came out all of a sudden, so it’s to bad-mouth me is it? Actually, how is it that he’s caught your eye? Unlike Minerva, I don’t see a reason why you’d get all cozy with him. I thought you didn’t like him.”

Carmilla: “A, r—rea—reason, like... Minerva-chan? No, I don’t have, any... thing like, that. But, Echidna-chan, you... tr—tricked, me... didn’t you?”

Speaking in a frail and stuttering voice, Carmilla looked down as she responded to Echidna’s methodical statements. However, unlike the frailty of her voice, the actual contents of her words implied no weakness or compromise.

Carmilla puttered her fidgety gaze around, glancing several times at Echidna,

Carmilla: “I-I don’t like... him, but, you tr—tricked, me... E—Echidna-chan, so I’m, not, on your side any, anymore, you know? People, who trick, me, h—hate, me... do, m—mean things to me, I... I will never forgive.”

—Those last words alone were spoken with incredible clarity.

It was such that, for a moment, Subaru couldn’t process the fact that those words had come from the girl beside him. So utterly detached that voice was from his impression of this girl up to now. Except,

Carmilla: “———”

Wordlessly, yet determined and unwaveringly, Carmilla stared at Echidna.

In her eyes there churned an indescribable emotion— a whirlpool of something dark and grudging, unforgiving of the one who had offended her with their transgression.

A pure mass of narcissism— that description suddenly scraped across Subaru's mind.

Echidna: "While it may've been a necessary measure, doing something contrary to Carmilla's desires was a mistake on my part. There is nothing more unenviable than making an enemy of you, Carmilla."

Carmilla: "E—everyone, is, on my side... so, it, won't be pleasant, to have me, hate, you... you know? You can, a—apologize, but, I won't, forgive, you..."

Carmilla wasn't just an equal balance of timidity and rebellion. Her personality was so introverted that she was too timid to even properly communicate with others— But that had very little to do with the intensity of her retribution against those who wronged her.

Subaru: "What've you all been... What've you all been talking about!?"

Finally disrupting the perilous atmosphere between the Witches, Subaru broke his silence and blurted out. Feeling the gazes of all three Witches falling on him, Subaru frantically turned his neck, and,

Subaru: "How long are you gonna leave me out of the conversation!? I, I'm the one who must make a decision here! Say it in a way I can understand! Echidna, what're you hiding!? And you two, what is it you know that's making you want to stop me!?"

Minerva: "“Even saying that you're in a mentally frail position, stopping all thinking and immediately going to grasp an offered hand is totally naïve... and what guided you into doing that was all of your oh-so-careful planning!"

Echidna: "You make me sound like a villain. Won't that make him misunderstand? If we seal this Contract, I will certainly help him, and guide him to the optimal destination he desires. My only request is to see what he sees, hear what he hears, and learn what he learns in the process. Not a single one of the things I said was false."

Minerva blasted back at the protesting Subaru, her voice trembling in rage. All the while, Echidna remained calm as always.

Listening to the pristine clarity of Echidna's voice, Subaru began sensing that something was awry. Having overcome the state of heated delirium up to now, he once again scrutinized over Echidna's words. Over her attitude, and why the other two Witches tried to stop him.

What was out of place? She didn't say anything strange. Both the other two Witches acknowledged that she wasn't lying. So then, where was the problem...?

Echidna: "I will repeat, Natsuki Subaru. If you choose me, choose to seal this Contract with me—I will without fail lead you to the place you desire..."

???: "—«In the end», would be the necessary disclaimer to this promise, right? Haa..."

Just as Echidna reached out her hand to Subaru, a listless voice covered over her words.

Looking up, he saw a monster made of magenta hair who had appeared opposite to Carmilla— sitting on the ground, buried in her own long hair, it was the Witch of Sloth.

The increasing number of Witches didn't surprise Subaru anymore. But, what Subaru did pick up was,

Subaru: "In the, end...?"

Sekhmet: "I'm sure Echidna, huu... is certain to fulfill the Contract, haa. But, so long as she maintains the fact, huuu... that she intends to fulfill the Contract, haa... she can probably do whatever she likes in the process, huu."

Subaru: "Do, whatever she—"

Tying together Sekhmet's intermittent, huffing words with the sense of awryness he had felt earlier, a single explanation emerged in Subaru's mind.

But that explanation was simply too hard to accept. His face stiffening in shock, Subaru looked towards Echidna, who had closed her eyes, and,

Subaru: "Echidna, if I Contract with you... without fail, you will definitely lead me to the optimal future, that's what you're saying?"

Echidna: "Yes, it is. That is a fact. Without a doubt, I will carry out this Contract to the end. With my knowledge and your ability, we will certainly be able to achieve it."

Yes, surely, the Contract will be properly fulfilled.

There were no lies in Echidna's words. If Subaru cooperates with her, they will certainly be able to save everyone and reach that perfect future. However,

Subaru: "As you guide me towards the optimal future— will we be taking the optimal path?"

Echidna: "——"

Subaru: "Will you truly be doing everything in your power to bring me to the place I desire?"

Echidna: "——"

Subaru: "Why're... you saying nothing. Answer me, Echidna... no... Witch of Greed!!!"

Lifting his head, Subaru screamed at the top of his lungs.

Though still held against the ground with his joints locked in place, Subaru paid it no heed as he single-mindedly glared at Echidna.

On the other end of his razor-sharp gaze, Echidna let out a small sigh.

Echidna: "—If you wish to reach the optimal future, you will have to permit certain sacrifices along the way. Could it be that you lack even that resolve, Natsuki Subaru?"

Subaru: "———Ugh."

Her response neither affirmed nor denied what Subaru had asked her. But Subaru had realized it.

Echidna's words just now weren't meant to dispel his doubts. Instead, as if intending to make her thoughts known to him, she spread out her arms,

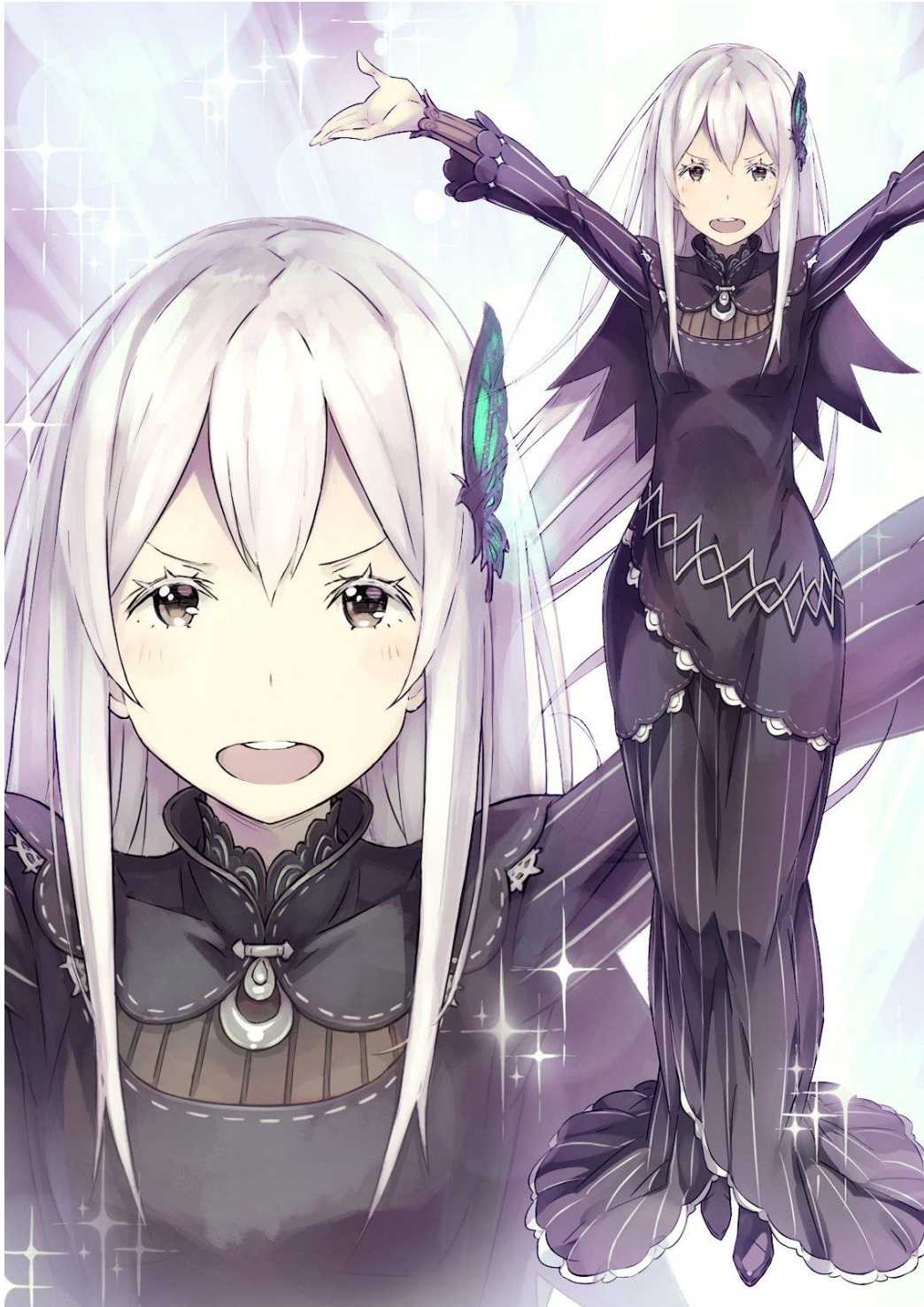


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Echidna: “This extraordinary ability you possess, Return by Death, is an incredible authority. Its utility is something you don’t yet truly comprehend. By refusing to allow endings that are contrary to your desires, you repeatedly retry, and repeatedly reach for the future— that is the near-perfect ideal for a researcher. But of course. In the first place, once an event has reached its outcome, it would mean that no other outcome could take its place. While in the process of reaching an outcome, it is possible to hypothesize on various possibilities of what that outcome may be. Such an approach under such conditions can serve to verify such various propositions. But when there is an actual result you want to reach, the outcome of each experiment and the hypothesis it verifies must forever remain singular. All the while, to truly reproduce the exact same conditions is impossible. No matter how meticulous the preparation, deviation from the conditions of that particular point in time is inevitable. And so too, is the question, «what would the results have been if I had done things differently?»— Forever out of the reach of an researcher such as myself, instead being what you’d call a dream beyond a dream. Possessing the Memories of the World, there are indeed ways in which I could come to know the answers. But while they exist, I have no desire to use or rely on such methods. My desire to know is not simply a desire to have knowledge. Even for me, that distinction is quite a contradictory and loathsome thing. But I’m getting carried away, let’s return to the topic at hand... For one such as myself, with no choice but to accept the singularity of the outcomes, having but one means of observation, your existence and your Authority is a godsend. Using the exact same conditions to conduct a different test, and see a different outcome from what originally should have been— who would not desire such ultimate Authority? Seeing it laid before one’s eyes, who could go without first trying absolutely everything? Of course, I have no intention of taking it by force. In the end, you will be the one making full use of Return by Death for your own purposes. I will ensure that you reach your desired future to the absolute best of my ability. And, in the process, if possible, I would fully like to sate my curiosity to the fullest possible extent. Surely, you won’t fault me for such a measly request. You will get your answers. I will sate my curiosity. Our interests are entirely aligned. Since I don’t know the answers myself, I certainly won’t misguide you on purpose towards the most wretched endings possible. When first encountering a problem, I’ll be just as ignorant as you are to what the optimal solution may be. So together, we will ponder, agonize, and find the answers as partners. I can say this without the slightest embarrassment. I am immensely fond of you, that is, for your capacity to increase my means of inquiry, and I swear I will never do anything to impede you. Of course, when initially without answers, I cannot guarantee a smooth resolution to every problem even with my help. While I can aid you with the strength of my knowledge, I can never directly interfere with reality. Should the obstacle before you require physical, material strength, I cannot help you. Time after time, perhaps in the hundreds and thousands, your mind and body may be shattered and

torn. But even should that hypothetically happen, I will faithfully tend to your heart. I must admit that not wanting to lose something as useful as you is part of that wish of mine. But, my fondness for you, and my intention to lend you my strength is genuine. I hope you won't think badly of me. Though I've said this over and over, I am confident that I will prove valuable to achieving your purposes. Indeed, just as I will be, in a sense, using you to satisfy the curiosity you also call my greed, you can also use me to attain your perfect future. To be that kind of overly convenient girl you can take advantage of, for me, is entire satisfaction. If doing so will motivate you, then I will gladly submit my being to you. Alas, I suppose that would be unfair to those girls within your thoughts—the subjects of your longing, the silver-haired half-elf, and the blue-haired Demon, the girls that your heart has sworn to save and protect. I won't go into what I think about the intense emotions you feel towards them, but I will simply state that the barricade standing before you is far greater than you could possibly imagine. Just the obstacles you are aware of now already have you struggling at your wit's end. While your resolve to overcome them alone is admirable, it would be far too desperate a fight. There is not the slightest falsehood in my desire to lend you my help. And you have every reason to make use of my willingness. You must use everything you have, use everything you can, and only then can you save the ones you hold dear. Isn't that what you have vowed, and the conviction you took onto the painful path you have chosen? That is why I challenge you, repeat with you, and feel for you. The path you have sacrificed your lives to forge, as ironic as it is, has now been validated in the form of the Second Trial. Perhaps, the Trial might offer the illusion that it existed to make you understand the nature of the path you have walked, and as such, was necessary. Yet the truth is that it was not necessary, and those scenes in fact only served to wear down your heart. However, between a state of ignorance and a state of knowing, no matter how appalling the truth may be, I will always value the latter. Up until now, and also from now on, you will need to present your life as compensation for Return by Death, and in doing so seize the perfect future. As you do so, you will constantly keep in the back of your mind the possibility that the sacrifices you have made and those worlds themselves might still exist in some form or another. Someday, you'll cease to feel any emotion when it comes to paying with your life, your human emotions will wane, you'll cease to be rattled by the deaths of those precious to you, you'll submerge into a life of impassive, indifferent inertia, and even should you reach the optimum future, you will be reaching it as an impaired version of yourself. For the sake of avoiding this kind of future, where the only thing that remains is a vain feeling, this was necessary. Indeed, there is not a single useless thing in this world, every path is necessary, everything is an indispensable piece of the puzzle. The Trial was necessary for you to comprehend that. If you need to make sense of the reasons why you have now stopped in your tracks, then you can think of it this way. And I will affirm your thoughts. If my words can give you the strength to move forward,

then I will endeavor to give them. Be it consolation, incitement, whispers of love, or evocations of contempt, if it can become your strength, then I will not hesitate to use it. You might hate it, but you will certainly need me on your path ahead. If you are to proceed along this road of unavoidable pain and solitude, then you will need someone to walk alongside you who will never veer their sight from the path. If you leave this role to me and to no one else, then I am willing to walk this road alongside you without question. I will repeat it, I will restate it, I will convey it as many times as necessary until it reaches you— You need me. And I need you. I need you immensely. My curiosity can no longer be quenched by anything except you. You are the only one in existence who can satisfy me. My insatiable Greed will surely be fulfilled by you alone. Your existence is already indispensable to me in this closed-off world. If you wish to be someone else's hope and use your power to slice open their world, could you not take pity on my miserable self so that I may partake in the fallen scraps as well? If you will bequeath me this kindness, then without a moment's hesitation, I will offer up my body, my knowledge, and my soul. And so, I beg of you. Please trust me. That I haven't told you my true feelings until now was never because I wanted to deceive you. I was merely waiting for the right moment to do so. At this stage, the instant I appealed to you with even a fragment of my true intentions, you surely would have left me. That would have been an unbearable loss to me. And of course, for you as well, as it would certainly be a loss in the sense that you'd be distancing yourself from the future you seek. Although, with the power of Return by Death, you will inevitably reach your desired future. Nevertheless, it will certainly be preferable to reach that future while paying as little in compensation as possible. With me, with me you can lighten that price. I do not want you to make the mistake of thinking that this means that as long as you reach the desired future, the details can be held in contempt. Indeed, falling into temptation and failing to advise you of the optimal path just so I can see the end of a thread is not something which I am so confident in my control over my desires that I can guarantee will never happen. This I will confess. But I will never mislead you. If, on the off-chance I do betray your trust in this way, I will under no circumstances try to hide it from you. I will certainly disclose it. And then, do everything in my power to repair that damaged trust. No matter what happens, I will deliver you to the perfect future you desire. Absolutely, absolutely. And now, if you agree that this is necessary, then won't you choose me? All I want from you, all I ask of you is as I have mentioned in the Contract. After that, it is simply a matter of how much suffering you are willing to endure for your desired, coveted wish. I have told you my resolve. Now I would like to hear yours. Prove it to me, seal this Contract with me, enlist my assistance, and muster the will to reach your destined future. Do so, and you may for the first time boast that you have conquered the Second Trial. From there, proceed to the Third Trial, and overcoming that, liberate the Sanctuary. When you consider the calamity to befall your loves and those precious to you, this is indeed

exactly yet another Trial you must surmount. Show me that you have the strength and resolve to overcome it. Once you do, use me, plunder me, drink my knowledge, and take hold of the future ahead. What I desire from you, what I request from you, and what I offer you in return is as I have stated. All is as I have sincerely, honestly, willingly confessed it. So now, I want you to tell me. What is your decision? For the sake of sating a fragment of my curiosity too, of course.”

—A lovely smile rose onto Echidna’s face.

With her white, snow-like hair swaying and her cheeks flushed red from the heat of passion, she turned up her eyes to Subaru, awaiting his answer. Echidna’s eyelashes trembled in trepidation for his reply, as her fingers holding her chest anxiously fidgeted about. Her lips tried several times to speak, but, hesitating, she merely moistened them with her tongue.

Subaru looked up into the eyes of the one restraining him, Minerva.

For a while, they went on staring at each other, until Minerva spilled a small sigh and finally released Subaru’s arm. Freed from her hold, Subaru stood up with a roll of his shoulders.

Just as Minerva promised, the aching in his shoulders was gone. In fact, he could feel that his somewhat tensed waist and other parts of his body have been purged of their fatigue as well. Such was the terrifying healing of the Witch of Wrath’s Authority.

Subaru: “———”

Rolling out various parts of his body, Subaru checked the sensations in his limbs as he reorganized his thoughts.

About what he had heard just now, of Echidna’s unreserved, truest of true intentions.

Subaru: “Echidna.”

Echidna: “Yes?”

Subaru: “You’re... going to use me?”

To use, and be used. That was what Echidna had repeatedly proclaimed in her speech. Hearing it, Echidna nodded without hesitation.

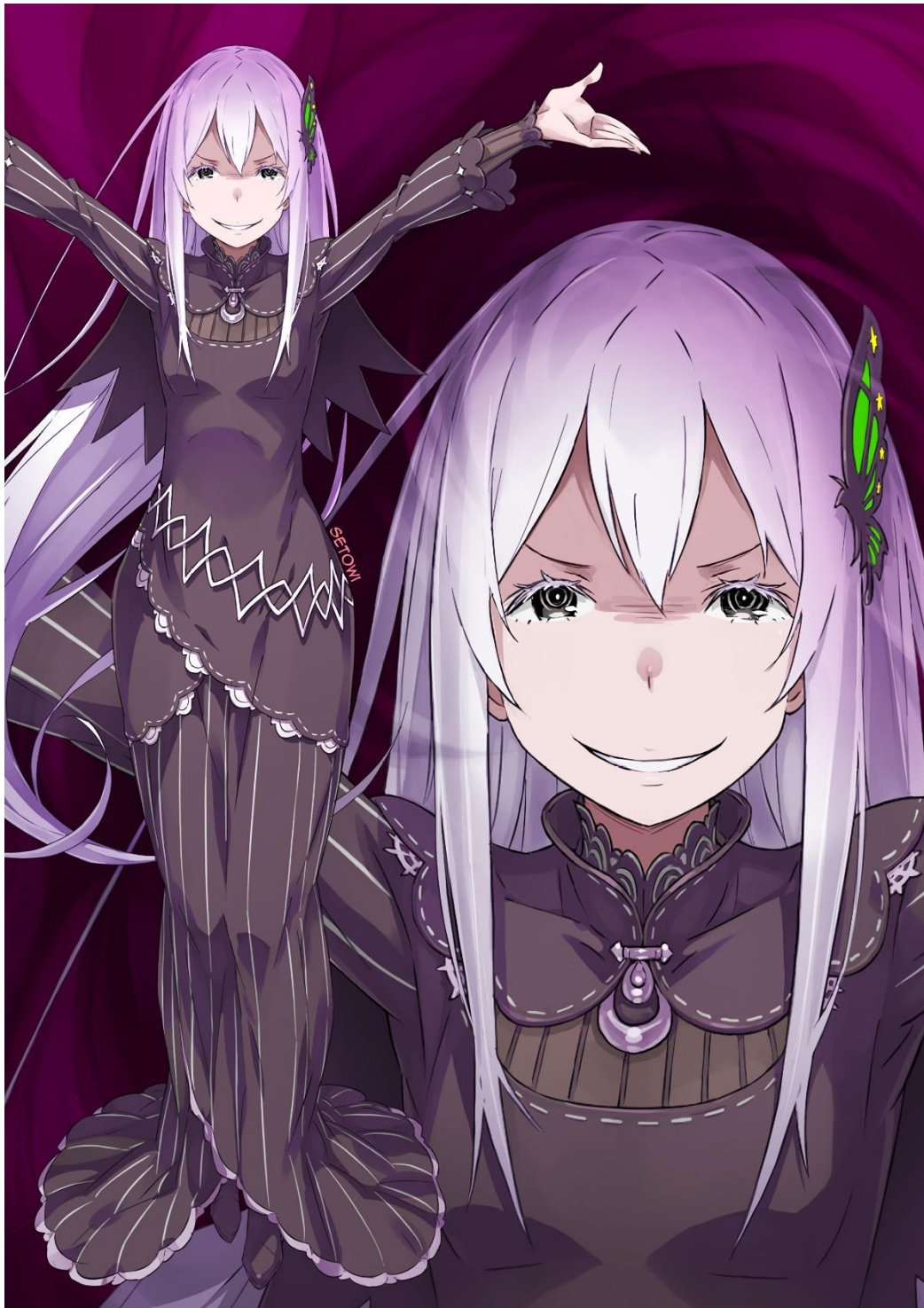


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Echidna: “I am. Just as you may use me. The Contract is merely a safeguard should either of us stray from that agreement. If you wish to chastise me for wanting to do everything in my power to hold onto you, then I can only resignedly accept it.”

Subaru: “It’s not that I haven’t thought about it... Ultimately, that’s what mutual interest is, I understand this too. As much as I hoped that you were only helping me out of the kindness of your heart... I was at least prepared to accept the reality that you weren’t. But...”

In front of Echidna, Subaru covered his face with his hand and leaned back his head.

Subaru: “It’s just, not there anymore...”

Echidna: “What... isn’t?”

Subaru: “Everything you have done up to this point... looks faded to me now. Every warmth you have shown me, everything that made me want to trust you, to start believing that perhaps you weren’t a bad person after all... All of it, has faded.”

Everything from their first meeting to this moment suddenly collapsed with a thud. Their first tea party, the scene during the Trial, interrupted by reality, when he countless times clung to her wisdom, her words. When he thought he could not regret forming a contract with her.

—All of it was now mercilessly jeering at Natsuki Subaru’s foolishness.

Subaru: “Was this your intention from the start?”

Echidna: “I don’t see what you have a problem with? If it means reaching the optimal future, then you won’t hesitate to take whatever path to get there— isn’t that the resolve you have made? You yourself have affirmed it, and I was merely agreeing and giving you a push on the back...”

Subaru: “When I decided that... when I hadn’t yet, and you tried to guide me down that path, was that all a part of your plan...? Is that what you’re telling me?”

Echidna: “I wouldn’t want you to misunderstand. That conclusion was entirely your own. All I’ve done was give you a little nudge. To blame your own conclusions on someone else is something I cannot agree with. I cannot agree with it, and I am not so meek that I’d just sit down and take it.”

Pouting up her lips, Echidna's face sulked in protest. That display of emotion was so childish and out of place that it only intensified Subaru's sense of incongruity.

Somehow, there was just something off about the degree of her affectations.

There was nothing wrong with where Echidna expressed her emotions. She would be indignant when doubted, smile when there was something to be happy about, and let slip glimpses of grief when there was reason to be sad. All of these were on point, and without error.

Yet this sense of incongruity, and the distrust it inspired, was because—

Subaru: "All your emotions are synthetic... and superficial."

Echidna: "———"

Subaru: "Whether you're happy, or mad, your emotions are equally childish and shallow. Just now, when you were riled, all you did was pout. It had nothing to do with magnanimity. Your reactions... All your reactions have been strange. Before... I had thought... you were just an easy-going, open-minded person, but..."

Echidna: "———"

Subaru: "The truth is something else. You're... You're someone who can't understand other people's emotions at all."

Recalling all of Echidna's behavior up to now, it was as if everything had been toned in sepia.

What he had previously imagined to be her good nature had in fact merely been owing to the shallowness of her emotions. The moment he saw through this, all their interactions abruptly faded of color.

And, even when showered by these unsparing words, Echidna's face remained unchanged from the sulking expression from before. As if she didn't know any way to express any greater discomfort.

Subaru: "This is where you're supposed to be angry, you know."

Echidna: "...Is that so. So here is where I should raise my voice, and shower you with insults? I see, now I learned something. I'll make sure I do so the next time I get the opportunity."

With the fall of Subaru's words, Echidna's expression vanished.

Expressionless—— it was something Subaru had never seen from the Echidna he knew. This was the true face of the Witch of Greed.

In front of Subaru, who had fallen into silence, Echidna snapped her fingers. In an instant, the destroyed hillock was restored to its original shape, and the shattered table and scattered chairs were formed anew.

Echidna sat down in one of the chairs, and pointed to the one opposite her,

Echidna: "Would you like to sit? I'd like us to iron out the details of the Contract."

Subaru: "...With things as they are, do you still think I'll readily consider a Contract with you?"

Echidna: "Unless, you are really going to reject me over such a small disagreement? What would be the point of that? Driven by the impulse of a moment to abandon the correct choice cannot be considered wise. I suggest you take a good look at reality and select the most rational course of action."¹³⁸

Faced with Echidna's words that were frozen of emotion, Subaru closed his eyes and held his breath. Echidna was right. Subaru was the one who was losing himself to impulse—— There was no way around it. Her argument was sound. Nor was she lying. All Echidna did was hide her true intentions from Subaru. She had merely kept silent about how she benefited from observing Subaru on his path.

If he sealed this Contract, chances were he would finally reach the correct solutions. And that he would obtain Echidna's unreserved cooperation was also an indisputable fact.

Subaru: "There is one thing... I've been meaning to ask you the moment I got to see you again."

Echidna: "——Hm, and what is that?"

Subaru: "Once I hear the answer, I think I'll be ready to choose."

Echidna awaited Subaru's question.

¹³⁸ Note by SummaryAnon: "Echidna's pronoun once again reverts from her usual «boku» (ボク) to «watashi» (わたし)."

Subaru would put forth this question as his touchstone: the question he hadn't been able to find even a fragment of an answer to since embarking on the loops starting in the Sanctuary. A question which she could not possibly have nothing to do with.

Subaru: “—You know about Beatrice, don't you, Echidna.”

Echidna: “...Yes, I do. I was rather deeply involved in her creation, in fact. Did something happen with her?”

Echidna returned this innocent reply, seemingly bearing no hidden meaning, yet rife with questions all the same.

Subaru closed his eyes once more, seeing the girl with drill-curls in his mind.

In her last moments, with her back pierced through, just before she vanished.

At the end of her long, long solitude, the shadow she had cast within him remained heavy in his heart.

Knocking Subaru aside, shielding him from that murderous blade, that final expression she showed him—even now, was seared into the back of his eyes, refusing to fade. And so,

Subaru: “Because of her Contract, Beatrice has been waiting for That Person to come. Are you the one who forged this Contract with her? Are you the one who bound her to the mansion?”

Echidna: “I don't remember specifying a location... but I was the one who received her promise to guard the Forbidden Library and to wait for someone to come.”

Subaru: “Then... who is That Person? What'll I have to do to free her?”

Through four-hundred years of solitude, Beatrice had been waiting for someone. Yet not even Beatrice herself knew who that someone was. Nor did Subaru have the slightest clue.

But if he asked Echidna herself, the one who had arranged this promise in the first place—

Echidna: “Now who would it be, I wonder?”

Subaru: “—Ah, uh?”

Echidna: “Nono, I wasn’t joking, I really am wondering. Who do you think Beatrice’s awaited person would be?”

Echidna asked, as if she had been presented with a question she did not know the answer to. Stunned by this reply, Subaru shook his head,

Subaru: “Even you... don’t know who Beatrice is waiting for?”

Echidna: “No, I don’t. I have no idea who Beatrice’s awaited person would be.”

Subaru: “But... how? Weren’t you the one who told her to wait in the Forbidden Library? If you don’t know, then... unless...”

The one who instructed Beatrice to wait in the Forbidden Library was Echidna, but it could’ve been someone else who set the condition for her to wait for That Person to come.

If so, then the one who would know the answer would again be someone else—

Echidna: “No, you’re mistaken.”

Subaru: “———”

Echidna: “I was the one who instructed Beatrice to wait for That Person. You weren’t wrong about that. What you got wrong was something more fundamental.”

Subaru: “Funda... mental?”

Echidna: “Just why in the world did I seal this Contract with Beatrice? That is where you are misunderstanding. I made Beatrice guard the Forbidden Library so that she could give its contents to That Person, is that what you thought?”

He couldn’t understand what Echidna was saying.

It was just a natural assumption. When instructing someone to give something to someone else, naturally, the intention was for that thing to end up in the right person’s hands.

But, in front of Subaru’s instinctive interpretation, Echidna shook her head, and said,

Echidna: “That wasn’t the point of my instruction to Beatrice. I sealed the Contract with her, having her wait for That Person... while waiting for the result of just who she would choose That Person to be.”

Subaru: “———”

Subaru: “———”

Subaru: “—————”

Subaru: “—————”

Subaru: “—————What?”

Echidna: “You see, that child was created for a specific purpose. But necessity arose for her to live in a way that differed from her original purpose... For that, she had to go far away from here, and there, she needed to be given a new purpose. For that child, who was now hollow, it was necessary to give her a reason to live. It was for that, that I sealed this Contract with her.”

Subaru: “—Tha... t’s.”

Echidna: “Watching over the Forbidden Library, and eventually handing it over in its entirety to That Person who was destined to come. I placed no limitations, since, in the first place, there is no correct answer. She stays alive just as planned, and I have another result to look forward to. It’s quite logical, don’t you think?”

Subaru: “———”

Echidna: “Of course, going four-hundred years without choosing anyone is yet another result. So was the fact that she did not simply choose one of the people she had met in her days to be That Person. And potentially, her deliberations over whether to break the Contract, desiring for her own death, is also another result.”

Subaru: “And how... do you feel about that?”

Echidna: “—? It’s quite marvelous, I think.”

As if she had just been asked something incredibly obvious, Echidna innocently tilted her head.

That reply, that attitude, and the expression of the girl he saw in his mind, all led him to the answer.

It's decided. Understood. Clearly understood.

—His misconception about who this person was that he was dealing with, has been rectified.

Subaru: "Echidna... You really, are a Witch."

Echidna: "——"

Subaru: "An indecipherable, unfathomable, monster."

Echidna: "——"

He told her. The answer that was in his heart.

He withdrew the hand he had almost given her, and as for who it would now reach out to, he has already decided.

Subaru: "I... I can't take your hand. I've already decided whose hand I'll be taking."

Echidna: "——"

Subaru: "With those callous, binding words, without the slightest malice, you stole four-hundred years from that girl— I've already decided. I'll be taking that girl's hand. Not yours."

That was their farewell. With it, he shook away the hand of the one he once thought would walk alongside him.

He lifted his face. And looked forward.

Beneath his eyelids, he saw that girl's final expression.

—Disappearing, dying, afraid, twisted as if about to cry, but nonetheless relieved that she had protected Subaru.

He would take the hand of the girl who mourned his death, that much was decided.

Echidna: “———”

Echidna’s eyes narrowed. Flickers of thought flashed through her irises as if pondering on what words to say to Subaru.

Yet before she could, the change had arrived.

Minerva: “———She’s here.”

Carmilla: “Oh, no, I... I don’t want, anything, to do with... this, anymore.”

Sekhmet: “At a troublesome time, a troublesome girl, has come to cause more trouble, haa...”

The three onlooking Witches all gave their respective reactions.

He felt an overwhelming pressure on his back.

While in front, staring at what was behind him, Echidna’s eyes slightly widened. Following her astonished gaze, Subaru turned around, and saw it——

???: “———”

——With everything above her neck shrouded in pitch darkness, there stood the Witch of Envy.



Character Pages for Volume 12

Characters

Re: Life in a different world
from zero

Characters

Re: Life in a different world
from zero

The only ability I got in a different world "Returns by Death"
I die again and again to save her.

カーミラ
Carmilla

『色欲』の魔女。明るい桃色の髪を
腰まで伸ばし、ゆるく纏めている。
伏し目がちでおどおどとした印象の美少女。



セクメト

Sekhmet

『怠惰』の魔女。
無造作に伸びた赤紫の髪が
特徴的な気だるげな美女。

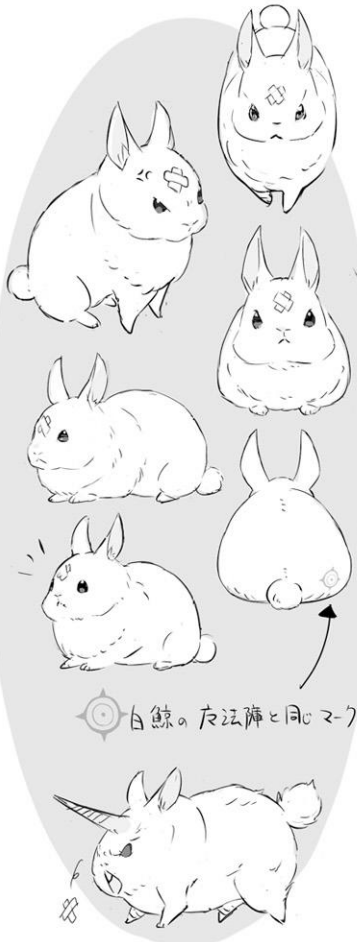


あとがき

今回も初期デザインも
大公開!

大兔 初期 Ver.

通常は絆創膏でツノを
隠してる設定でした



セク外 初期 Ver.

前巻から
おハロツブームが
続いている
セク外姉さんも
下着姿になる
ところでした...



Web Novel Volume 13



Arc 4 Chapter 76 - ≠Satella

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 13, Chapter 1 “The Sounds that Make You Want to Cry”, Part 1

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

—This would be the first time Subaru had ever met face to face with the Witch herself like this.

The Witch of Envy, it was a name which he had heard countless times before, and a Witch whose threat he had experienced first-hand during their showdown in that loop inside the Sanctuary.

Defying the rules she had one-sidedly imposed upon him, it wasn't once or twice that he had tasted the pain of his heart being crushed within her grasp, nor was it easy for him to have any positive impressions of the Witch who possessed Emilia's body while unleashing destruction upon the Sanctuary.

It was especially so now, after his last conversation with Echidna had spawned within him an aversion to the word “Witch” itself. But,

Subaru: “Right... this one... is on a whole different level from the other Witches.”

Facing the pressure emanating from the Witch standing before him, Subaru squeezed out this hoarse mutter.

It was a slender woman.

Standing languishingly with her arms dangling at her sides, she seemed to be staring at Subaru. Shrouding over her body was a pitch-black dress— literally woven from the shadows rising from her feet, pulsing, as if in rhythm with her heartbeat.

Though her sleeves were long, he could eerily see her hands from the tips of her pale fingers up to her wrists. Chances were, like the other Witches, the Witch of Envy must be exceedingly beautiful.

But the most vital piece required to confirm this was missing.

Subaru: “Seen it quite a few times now... but what’s the deal with that?”

An impenetrable shadow covered everything above the Witch’s neck, making visual confirmation impossible. Unlike the darkness of her dress, the shadow drifted about like a mist, hiding the face of the Witch of Envy from Subaru.

The Witch gave no reaction to the dumbstruck Subaru’s question.

Driven by the surging apprehension scorching inside his heart, sweat emerged on Subaru’s forehead as he looked to the ones around him— at the other four Witches, watching in absolute silence.

Subaru: “———”

But when he saw the change in their expressions, Subaru was taken aback.

As far as he knew, the relationship between the Witch of Envy and the other Witches was that between a murderer and her victims. To meet their own killer— Subaru was at least aware of how much mental distress that should bring.

But the expressions on the Witches’ faces were nothing like what Subaru had imagined.

One was a gentle smile, one was a gaze of saddened sympathy, one was of innocent indifference, and lastly—

Echidna: “So you have broken my boundary to get in here. Brazenly trespassing into my Dream Citadel... always the egotist, aren’t you.”

Only one, Echidna, glared at the Witch of Envy with eyes of pure hostility.

Seeing that hatred, or something like it, from none other than Echidna astonished Subaru. Just now, he had voiced his final farewell thinking that she was incapable of such feelings, yet this blatant outpour of emotion made him wonder if he had been mistaken.

Although, realistically speaking, the time for such thoughts had already passed. Right now, the problem was how to deal with this motionless Witch before his eyes.

Subaru: “But why is she here in the firs...”

Minerva: “Because you made her mad by blabbing about stuff you shouldn’t have? I don’t know what to do with men like you who can’t keep their mouth shut. I can kinda get why she’d be furious.”

Subaru: “What, I don’t get it... I mean, are you actually taking her side? I thought you and the Witches were her enemies.”

Minerva: “Enemies, that is such a stupid thing to hear... We’ll see if you are right or wrong about that and show you.”

Narrowing her eyes at Subaru, Minerva swayed her blond hair as she jolted into action.

Cutting in front of the Witch of Envy’s line of sight that was fixed on Subaru, she pushed out her busty chest as she magnificently faced down the Witch. And then,

Minerva: “Can you hear me? It’s me, Minerva? The Witch of Wrath, Minerva? If you remember me and hear me, say something?”

Subaru: “—! No, w—wait! As far as I know, talking won’t work with her! If you do anything weird to provoke her...”

Sekhmet: “Just keep quiet and watch, haa.”

In Subaru’s eyes, what Minerva was doing could only be called reckless. But just as he tried to stop her, he was interrupted by the hairball sprawling on the ground, Sekhmet.

Subaru turned around, while the magenta-colored hairball that was Sekhmet slightly shifted in size,

Sekhmet: “The time we spent together with that thing, huu... is many times longer than what your short interactions have been, haa. It’s only natural that you’d be worried, huu... But you can leave it to Minerva, haa... She does things without thinking sometimes, huu. But, that’s probably not the case this time, haa...”

Minerva: “I can hear you, Sekhmet! If you don’t want me to mess up the conversation and get all of us swallowed, then don’t say things that’ll make me mad! I’m completely enraged here!”

Sekhmet: “When you can get mad at people, huu... just for breathing in front of you, haa... what am I supposed to do, huu.”

Even while getting hit with that unflattering critique, Minerva did not take her eyes off the threat in front of her.

The Witch of Envy also made no reaction to this little back and forth, but only stood there, unmoving, staring through the Witch of Wrath at Subaru.

Indeed, this was definitely a departure from the direct, instinctive reactions the Witch had exhibited up to now. But all that meant was that she hadn’t taken any hostile actions so far, and whether or not a conversation could be established between them was still a different matter.

All the while, as Sekhmet left the conversation entirely to Minerva, the other two Witches—

Carmilla: “Well I—I... think, if, Minerva-chan, tr—tries her, best... i—it’ll, turn out, alright... you know? But if, she... hu—hurts, Minerva-chan... I—I’ll kill, her.”

Echidna: “I don’t doubt it, but as I’ve told you before, your affinity is terrible with that thing. The only one here who can resist it is Sekhmet— Do you understand?”

Echidna kept her voice as calm as she could as she pacified the stuttering but belligerent Carmilla. Meanwhile, the bundle of hair shuddered as she noticed the white-haired Witch’s gaze, as if even replying was too much of a nuisance.

Sekhmet: “Even I can’t keep its movements sealed for long, haa. You know that my abilities aren’t suited for that, huu.”

Echidna: “Of course I know. That’s why you just need to pulverize its limbs and throttle its neck. Once you disable its movements and stop it from breathing, I can abolish it from this space with my own hands.”

There was enough hostility in Echidna’s words to make Carmilla’s statement seem cute. Though she said it with a casual air, the unconcealable disgust seeping into her voice made it clear that she wasn’t joking. In front of the Witch of Envy, only Echidna left no shred of doubt about the certainty of her contempt.

While this perilous conversation was going on behind her, Minerva continued her standoff against the Witch of Envy. In fact, as if trying to keep the Witch of Envy from overhearing the other Witches, she took a step closer.

Subaru: “———”

Subaru gulped down his breath as he watched Minerva’s advance. While her actions simply seemed insane to Subaru, it made even less sense why the Witch of Envy appeared here in the first place.

If this was like the previous times, the Witch of Envy would have shown up because Subaru had violated the taboo. But the Witch’s methods so far had been materializing her arm to clench at his heart and physically appearing in the real world to swallow everything into shadow.

Friendly interactions were obviously impossible, so the Witch of Envy had never even explained what her intentions were. Her goals were just as mysterious now as they were from the very beginning. And so, just how the Witch would react to Minerva’s actions was still completely unknown to Subaru.

—If Minerva got swallowed by the shadow, the other three behind her would move instantly.

If Echidna’s expectations for Sekhmet were justified, the Witch of Sloth should be able to crush the Witch of Envy with her Authority, and Echidna would be able to expel the weakened Witch of Envy from this place. But if that was the case—

Subaru just couldn’t understand why they weren’t doing it now.

Subaru: “———”

Speaking of strange, the fact that Minerva was tasked with communication with the Witch of Envy in the first place was very strange.

Carmilla only swore to retaliate if something happened, Sekhmet did not seem to want any active hostility, and even Echidna, overflowing with contempt, did not defy Minerva’s wishes by ordering a preemptive strike.

Just what on earth were they thinking—

Echidna: “You look like you are getting spun around trying to understand us Witches just now.”

Subaru: “...”

Echidna: “Although, if our... I mean, if our thoughts could be seen through so easily, we wouldn’t be called Witches. I’d feel troubled if you took us so lightly.¹³⁹”

Subaru: “Cut it out with the fake *Bokukko*¹⁴⁰ already— I just thought if you really wanted to expel the Witch of Envy, now would be the best chance to do it while she’s defenseless.”

Echidna: “I see. Is that how you perceive this situation? Oh my... Mhm, is that right. Personally, I’m all for what you are proposing. After all, nothing would make me happier than to bash that thing with every Authority at my disposal and annihilate it until not even a speck of dust remains, but...”

Cutting off her words there, Echidna narrowed her eyes. That attitude wasn’t like her at all— it wasn’t like he really knew her even now, but Subaru nevertheless sensed a certain reluctance that was entirely unlike her as he waited for her next words.

After a short silence, Echidna continued,

Echidna: “Doing everything in my power to eradicate that thing and having the other Witches turn on me would be putting cart before ground dragon¹⁴¹. Even disregarding Minerva, it’d be a rather terrible bet to make enemies of Sekhmet and Typhon.”

Subaru: “I don’t get it. Why would expelling the Witch of Envy make them turn on you? She’s your enemy, the same should go for all of you...”

Carmilla: “It’s, not like, that...though...?”

Carmilla, who had kept silent up to now, suddenly interrupted Subaru’s question. Without looking at the startled Subaru, Carmilla went on watching Minerva’s standoff against the Witch of Envy, and quietly stuttered,

¹³⁹ Note by TranslationChicken: “Echidna’s started using «boku» (ボク) to refer to herself again”.

¹⁴⁰ A girl that uses the pronoun “boku” (ボク), which is primarily used by boys and young men. Most are Tomboys or completely unaware of social norms.

¹⁴¹ Stylization! Original expression used by both SummaryAnon and TranslationChicken was “cart before horse”, which isn’t wrong, but have you ever seen a horse in the ReZero world?

Carmilla: “Envy is, everyone’s, enemy... that’s... right, but, that thing... and, her... are, different, you know?”

Subaru: “...What’s that supposed to mean? What are you guys...”

Sekhmet: “As long as we don’t know... which one that thing over there is, huu... it’s not just that we don’t want to... it’d also be unreasonable... haa...”

Subaru: “Which... one...?”

Sekhmet followed up with her explanation. But hearing it only threw Subaru into even further disarray. What on earth were they talking about? Yet, the answer came from a different direction.

Taking a step forward, Minerva moved closer to the Witch of Envy. She spread out her arms, assuming a posture of nonresistance, and asked the Witch of Envy,

Minerva: “—Are you the Witch of Envy? Or are you Satella? Which?”

※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※

He felt like he had just heard something that would turn everything he knew on its head.

Minerva’s question ran completely contrary to what Subaru thought he understood. But the silence of the other Witches who had personally lived through that era only confirmed that Minerva was neither confused nor joking.

Hearing Minerva’s call, for the first time, the Witch of Envy’s shoulders trembled. The black mist concealing her head writhed, as she apparently turned towards Minerva.

—It was only now that the Witch seemed to have noticed Minerva’s existence.

Subaru: “———”

There was no time for Subaru to ask, “what did she mean by that?”, even as the sense of apprehension tightening in his throat rapidly exacerbated his restlessness.

The Witches' affirmation only further confounded Subaru's thoughts. Since, Minerva's words would mean that---

---The Witch of Envy, Satella. This character might in fact be someone else...

No. That would be over-interpreting from the little information he was given.

How many times had he gone through painful experiences because he fell into such stubborn assumptions with only superficial clues to go on? Although he must always consider the possibilities, he must not get stuck on any particular idea.

More importantly, he couldn't afford to divert his attention from the scene before him for even a second.

Minerva: "Since you didn't attack me after the very first question... There's still a chance."

Saying this, Minerva closed the distance.

Between the Witch of Wrath and the Witch of Envy, there were now only five steps remaining.

Minerva: "Though, if you were the Witch of Envy, I'd be surprised you didn't attack out of jealousy the moment I stood between you two... So I'm not that worried."

Four steps.

Minerva: "Then again, you could've said something right from the start. I know it's hard to have this face-to-face considering our relationship. And your last expression when you swallowed me back then isn't something I can forget."

Three steps.

Minerva: "Rather than the other five, I thought it'd be way better if it was me. Besides Typhon, out of the other Witches, I was your... closest friend, I believed."

Two steps. She lowered her head.

Minerva: "Yeah, that's what I thought... and because I thought this...!"

Stooping down, with only two steps between them, Minerva leaned forward, pouring her strength into her back leg. And,

Minerva: “Do you realize what it feels like to be ignored, when it’s been so long—!?”

The ground exploded, instantly annihilating the distance between them.

Minerva charged forward leaving a cloud of dust in her wake as she twisted her body to punch with all her might. Piercing the air, breaking through the sound barrier with a thunderous clap, the strike continued towards the Witch’s head, drilling towards the shadow obscuring her visage, and—

Minerva: “—There, I knew it.”

Minerva’s fist miraculously stopped mere inches from the Witch’s face.

It wasn’t because the Witch’s shadow reached out to tangle her arm. But instead, Minerva had intentionally stopped just before the strike would reach her.

With her fist still extended, Minerva leaned back, swaying her golden hair,

Minerva: “Look, see? She knew there was no need to dodge my punches, it’s Satella, not the Witch of Envy. Echidna, you were worrying too much.”

Echidna: “...I wonder. While I honestly admire your courage in using your own body to test it out, it’s no guarantee that it is as you say. It could just be that it perceived your threat to be so negligible that it naturally didn’t react. As such, Sekhmet...”

Sekhmet: “You’ll find any reason you can to get me to move, huu... and you are just as bad at knowing when to give up, Echidna, haa... Admit it, that’s Satella, huu.”

Sekhmet let out a sigh at the silenced Echidna. Still curled up as a ball of hair, the Witches’ final weapon showed no intention of moving. Then, standing within reach of the Witch— Satella, Minerva turned back to Subaru.

Seeing himself reflected within her pale-blue eyes, still unable to take in the fact that she was standing right beside that enormous threat, Subaru only stood there, dumbstruck.

Seeing this, Minerva snorted, and pouted with a dissatisfied expression,

Minerva: “What are you standing there for? Come on, get over here.”

Subaru: “Get... over... well, even if you say that...”

Minerva: “What, are you a man or not? I’m all the way over here and proved that it’s fine, didn’t I? So you can just scuttle over already. Right? Or is all this table-setting still not enough? If you won’t cross the stone bridge even when someone’s tapped it out for you, how are you ever gonna get across!?”

Subaru: “Don’t just get excited all of a sudden! It’s not like I won’t come over because I’m freaking out! I’m not going over there because I don’t know why I should!”

Shouting back at Minerva in the same indignant tone, Subaru objected to being left in the dark.

Pointing at Satella, who had apparently been deemed no immediate threat, Subaru looked around at the other Witches, who were unraveling from their combat stances,

Subaru: “First of all, what do you mean the Witch of Envy is different from Satella!? You keep talking about it like it’s obvious, but that’s not the case from where I’m standing!”

Echidna: “It’s not too complicated. When you forcibly insert a Witch Factor into someone with no compatibility for it, these afflictions are bound to arise. The Factor’s influence would lead to a Witch persona emerging, would then conflict with the original self... That’s one way to explain it. But as far as I’m concerned, they are one and the same, so I don’t see the point of differentiating the two like the others do.”

Subaru: “A split... personality...? Then, what’s...? You mean the one who swallowed you guys and carved those atrocities into history was the alternate personality, even though the original personality didn’t mean to...”

Echidna: “No, that’s not it either.”

Just as Subaru tried to make sense of the information he had been given Echidna stopped him. She shook her head, and, as if to correct Subaru’s theory,

Echidna: “Consuming half the world, and devouring us six Witches of Sin, were entirely Satella’s doing, not the Witch of Envy’s.”

Subaru: “Wh—!?! No, but that doesn’t make any sense! If the one who swallowed you was Satella, and that’s Satella standing over there... then...”

Sekhmet: “Actually, it does make sense, haa. While we cannot forgive the Witch of Envy, huu... we hold no grudge against Satella, haa... That’s all there is to it, huu...”

Carmilla: “I—I don’t... like, Satella-chan ei—either, but... at, least she’s, better, than, the Witch... I, guess.”

Sekhmet and Carmilla’s agreement only put more questions into Subaru’s head.

The Witches seemed to have some sort of consensus, but Subaru couldn’t understand it at all. They would forgive the personality that destroyed them, but not the alternate personality that didn’t— What was that supposed to mean?

Echidna: “I’ve always been asserting that such distinction is pointless... but it’s a futile effort. So, I can’t just ignore their feelings and eradicate that thing. My frail spiritual body won’t hold up for long if I do it, only to have them come after me. Even I can’t come back from having my only soul scattered into the wind.”

Subaru: “B... ut... Isn’t that extremely risky for the other five as well? You are the one keeping their souls intact. If you disappear, the other Witches would...”

Echidna: “They have already come to terms with their own deaths. So they have no special attachment to prolonging their existence as souls— They would rather choose destruction than live on betraying their ideals. It’s because they think this way that they are Witches.”

Neither Sekhmet nor Carmilla objected to Echidna’s words. “Resolute” might be too flattering of a description, but Subaru had no words for the uncompromising way the Witches chose to live.

“If only I could be like this”, “I wish I could be like this”, anyone would have had such thoughts at one point or another. But to stay true to their ideals even after death isn’t something anyone could do.

Subaru: “And Minerva...”

Is probably the same.

Before anyone else, she was probably the first to be destroyed by the Witch of Envy. But she still trusted her enough to approach within arm’s reach, and the result proved that that trust wasn’t misplaced.

Subaru didn’t know what kind of relationship these girls had had. But if there was this bond of trust between them, what drove the Witch of Envy to destroy the other six? And how was it, that they could then forgive her?

Echidna’s thoughts on it were at least understandable. But, even so—

Subaru: “I can see this is how you guys are. It’s a bit... hard to take in, but I think I got it. But, I still haven’t heard anyone explain to me why she’s here.”

Witches: “———”

Subaru: “She isn’t going to attack indiscriminately. I get that... But, that doesn’t mean she’s safe. If the one I’ve been dealing with was the Witch of Envy, then what does Satella want from me? The Witch of Envy has been a serious pain in the ass... So even if you suddenly tell me that this one’s different, it’s not like I’d just understand.”

Besides, according to the Witches themselves, Satella was definitely the one who devoured them. So even if the one who swallowed the Sanctuary was the Witch of Envy, it would seem that Satella was no less dangerous. So who could blame him for feeling threatened and wary, and wanting to stay away?

Subaru: “What does she want, why is she here. As long as no one tells me...!”

Minerva: “If you want to find out, then you should come over here.”

Minerva stopped him just as he was raising his voice. Placing her hands on her own hips, Minerva couldn’t hide the annoyance on her adorable face as she stared at Subaru.

Minerva: “That’s enough of your long-winded excuses and drawn-up defenses. I’m here standing right next to her, and nothing’s happened. She came here to see you too. So if you are gonna keep acting like a loser and won’t come near, that can only mean we’ve misjudged you.”

Subaru: “What was there to misjudge!? Don’t just go one-sidedly imagining things about me! And stop pushing that crap on me! What would you know about me, anyway!?”

Being slapped with some arbitrary image of himself, it wasn’t like he’d just start acting in accordance with it.

But, once, when Subaru had shouted that exact same thing, there came a voice that answered him. He could still remember what it said. And that those words had become his strength.

—If he didn’t want to betray that past-self that was saved by those words, then,

Subaru: “Agh, damn it... What was I thinking... Idiot...”

Being irrational, making decisions based solely on emotions. After so many painful experiences resulting from this, had he learned nothing at all? Instead, he should be paying attention to the details, stifling his emotions so he could act calmly, not out of impulse, but on facts alone— To uphold that never-wavering heart of steel.

That was what he had always wanted himself to be.

Minerva: “You are taking too long.”

Subaru: “What it’s like to be up-close to someone you’ve tangled to the death with... Crap, actually you do know, don’t you? It’s kinda hard.”

Minerva: “It’s not like we don’t have any thoughts on it. Sekhmet and Carmilla are just more mature, unlike me. But I have a reason to stand by her.”

Watching Subaru clicking his tongue as he walked over, Minerva shrugged. Giving him no time to ask her what that reason was, Minerva handed the scene over to Subaru. The Witch of Wrath naturally stepped aside as Subaru drew closer to the Witch— until he was face-to-face with Satella.

Subaru: “———”

Unwittingly gulping in front of the thing before his eyes, Subaru was at a loss for words.

Although he had already expected this while watching from afar, as well as while walking up to her, he still couldn't get used to the immense emanated pressure and the visual sense of incongruity. The dress of shadows clinging to her form traces out her curves and body with horrific sensuality, and the invisibility of everything from the neck up conversely creates an inverse kind of lusciousness.

But all that was instantly swept away by the dissonance of her unrecognizable head.

Subaru: "——"

Seeing her from up close, Subaru realized that it wasn't anything physical obstructing his recognition.

What seemed to be a darkness shrouding over her head was not, in fact, what hid her face from view. What made the Witch's face invisible was something more primordial, something on the mental level.

No physical obstacle was blocking her face from view. Instead, it was something instinctual that was not allowing him to see it.

Echidna: "Everyone wants to avert their eyes from their most repulsive delusions."

Subaru: "..."

Echidna: "If you can't see her face, then that's a problem with of own heart."

The cautioning voice came from behind him, affirming Subaru's realization.

Resisting the urge to fire back at her, Subaru ignored Echidna— or rather, he had no attention to spare as he continued to face against Satella.

In the interim, Satella had yet to take any kind of action. The only thing she had done so far was appear here, and it was those around her that had kicked up a fuss, frantically trying to prevent any potential damage from being brought about by her actions.

It'd be no exaggeration to say that the fear inspired by her presence was a testament to the danger her existence posed.

And, just when Subaru was growing impatient with her lack of motion,

Subaru: “—Hk!”

Satella: “———”

Seeing her hands suddenly reach out to him, Subaru’s throat froze.

Not distracted for a second or even a blink of an instant, Subaru kept his attention fixed on Satella. What would happen in the next moment? —The tension of not knowing was like imperceptible hands toying with his mind.

His shock was not because he had failed to see the hands move. Subaru clearly saw Satella’s hands move towards him. What surprised him was his own consciousness, which had quietly watched their approach to the end.

Subaru: “What... are you, really? What... do you want with me?”

In fact, Subaru hadn’t made any useful reaction to those hands reaching towards him. Though subconsciously understanding what her gesture meant, Subaru hastily uttered those words.

As if he didn’t need to acknowledge that fact, as though he didn’t have to face it, he wrenched out the words,

Subaru: “If you are... the one giving me the power to rewind... why... are you...”

He didn’t know why Satella was doing this.

Or why his body, facing Satella at a distance close enough to touch, despite him time and time and again screaming commands from the depths of his consciousness, was refusing to obey him.

—Was he supposed to feel so inexplicably relived in front of her?

Satella: “———u.”

Subaru: “—Ah?”

Still struggling with his disobedient body, Subaru belatedly reacted to the voice striking upon his eardrums. This time, it was no doubt the correct reaction to something so far outside his expectations.

Holding his breath, Subaru waited for her to continue.

In front of Satella, staring at him with her still-indiscernible expression, Subaru swallowed, as he went on waiting while time slowly passed on, until she spoke.

Satella: “———you.”

Subaru: “———”

Satella: “I have always, always loved you. You, and only you.”

Arc 4 Chapter 77 - Lonely

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 13, Chapter 1 “The Sounds that Make You Want to Cry”, Part 2
(halfway)

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken – [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

How to describe the impact that shocked through Subaru’s entirety the moment he heard that confession of love?

He felt the illusion of a bolt of lightning piercing him from head-to-toe.

Every pore of his body opened as goosebumps carpeted his skin, while the blood coursing through his veins seethed to a virulent boil. The thumping heartbeats in his chest flushed him red from the neck-up, as, roughly panting, Subaru stumbled one step backward.

He couldn’t stand there any longer.

If he kept standing there, his breaths would reach her, his fingertips would reach her.

If he didn’t get away from her now while he could barely keep his instincts in check, he wouldn’t be able to stop himself.

And if that happens, Subaru would be swept away by love—

Subaru: “Stop...”

Satella: “I love you.”

Subaru: “Please, stop...”

Satella: “I have always, and will always, love only you.”

Subaru: “I told you to stop—!!”

Shaking his head and swinging his arm, Subaru wrested his attention away from her hot, entangling gaze.

Still, Satella’s expression remained invisible to Subaru. And so, he couldn’t tell just what emotions were harbored within those eyes.

Yet the feverish pounding in his chest showed no signs of abating.

Only by consciously suppressing that feeling, desperately crying out, thrusting her with that rejection as if he was spitting out blood, could Subaru manage to preserve his fundamental self. If he didn’t maintain this effort to keep himself conscious, he was certain that his very existence would distort. And that thought terrified him to no end.

Blatantly rejecting her, flinging his open disgust, and slapping her with that truth, Subaru screamed, while Satella stood stock-still, as before.

Her unseen expression remained behind a veil of darkness. Indiscernible. Impossible to read. And yet, somehow, Subaru could tell that Satella was being injured by those words, and was now casting down her gaze. Somewhere within his heart, was an urge to caress her hair, console her to ease her pained expression, and whisper her his love so that perhaps she might smile again.

Even as he tried to reject it, his heart was insisting that he loved Satella.

Subaru: “Wh—what are you!? What did you do to me!? Just like Return by Death... did you put something in me, to manipulate my heart!?”

Subaru poured all of his distrust for his disobedient heart at Satella.

Just why was his heart suddenly reacting in a way that was utterly contrary to his understanding? If this overwhelming emotion inside him was also the doing of this Witch and her supernatural powers, then that’d be simply far too horrifying.

Twisting people’s hearts to suit her will— that was an abhorrent deed, less than human.

Natsuki Subaru’s crush on Emilia was the first glimmer of light he had ever received in this world. Lost, and without a single guideline in the midst of that initial desperation, he was indebted to Emilia for

extending him her hand, and his memories still told of her rescuing his heart just when it was all but abraded away. Even now, her existence had not lost even a fraction of that luster.

Over the days he spent repeating the loops starting from death, fighting alone through countless adversities, the number of precious people he wanted to protect had only grown, while the words, bonds, and feelings he shared with them slowly accumulated inside him.

By now, he could no longer say that his feelings for Emilia was his primary motivation.

But even so, Emilia was still the first ray of light Natsuki Subaru had received. And now Satella was demanding that Subaru experienced a crush of similar magnitude to what had awakened towards Emilia. Even though there was no word exchanged, no touch of warmth, no time spent together, no bond accrued, and nothing whatsoever shared between them, she was demanding feelings of love from him.

What could one call this, if not heinous?

Subaru: “You, and Echidna... You are both insane! This... This place is just full of incomprehensible bastards! I’m fucking sick of it!”

To the faceless Witch in front and the white-haired Witch behind him, Subaru screamed without hiding his disgust.

Satella, who sought to extort from him this baseless affection, and Echidna, who would entangle others to sate her devious curiosity, were both monsters beyond Subaru’s understanding.

Echidna: “It’s rather upsetting to be lumped together with that thing. Even though we are both technically Witches, to me, that is a vulgar creature several magnitudes below Witches. But incomprehensible, now you are not wrong there.”

Subaru: “Just shut up. You pretend to be friendly, but I haven’t forgotten how deceitful you are... Enough. There’s no point in me staying here. Let me out. I don’t wanna be involved with you people anymore!”

Cursing at Echidna, Subaru hugged his head and pleaded to be freed from her Dream Citadel.

He couldn’t stand another second in front of Satella and Echidna. There were enough things Subaru needed to worry about, now was not the time to be looking for more.

He was not omniscient, and there was a limit to how much he could handle. Yet why do the problems keep mounting, one after another, when the obstacles were already so stacked against him?

Subaru: "I'll never ask for any of your help again... All the problems outside, I'll deal with them myself— That's how it's supposed to be, isn't it!? That's what I should've done from the start..."

Minerva: "And then? You'll go back to dying over and over, making tons of people cry while spouting excuses to yourself like «this is information-gathering, there's no helping it»? Wow. Amazing."

Minerva crossed her arms and snorted at Subaru's words of definite parting. Then, seeing Subaru return her a glare, Minerva's unruffled face reddened,

Minerva: "What. Got something to say for yourself?"

Subaru: "Like it has anything to do with you. The pain, the anguish, the wounds, the wear I endure because of Return by Death, all that's got to do with is me! What right do you have to complain about it!?"

Minerva: "It's easy for you to say that you are ready for the pain, the suffering, and the anguish. Who cares about the feelings of those watching you spew blood, as your flesh is flayed, and your bones are crushed, right? You can always use the excuse you are the one who's suffering the most."

Subaru: "What...!?"

Minerva: "Just because you are taking on the most obvious, most visible wounds, you think the ones who receive lighter wounds as consequences of your actions have no right to complain about anything. After all, you are the one who's hurting the most. Suffering the most. Enduring the most... And so, naturally, the others around you should just shut up with their sniveling, right?"

Perhaps because of the rage building up as she spoke, Minerva's tone intensified as Subaru bared his teeth. There was just no way Subaru could let those merciless words go unanswered.

Subaru: "You! You think I'm getting drunk on my own tragedy just so that I can shut everyone else up!? That this dead-end road I'm walking is just a fucking act!?"

Minerva: “No, that’s not what I’m saying. All I’m telling you, is that thinking «It’s alright as long as I’m hurting more than anyone else» is cowardly. I’m not a fan of Echidna’s devious methods, and I can’t even hope to understand how roundabout Satella is, but... to me, compared to a Witch, the way you are twisted is a lot more sickening.”

Subaru: “———”

Minerva: “Above all, while I beat everything in order to heal them, the way you live is not only the opposite, but the antithesis of what I do— Isn’t that just way too ungrateful for what she’s doing for you?”

Holding out her small fist at Subaru, Minerva huffed out those words. Adding that quiet whisper at the end, she turned her blue eyes towards Satella.

Still standing there as before, Satella had stayed silent ever since Subaru showered her with abuse, making no indication of affirming or denying those words. Seeing this, Minerva narrowed her eyes, somewhat sadly.

But Subaru couldn’t care less about their sentimentality at this point.

Subaru: “Sickening... Ungrateful...?”

Catching Minerva’s last few words, with his face downcast, Subaru’s shoulders slightly trembled. The tremble grew larger, and, when Subaru lifted his face again, he was smiling.

It was far too asinine, how could he help but laugh?

Subaru: “The hell is that. Sickening or whatever... And just why do you think I chose to be like this? How did you think I got to this so-called twisted way of thinking? Whether it’s my methods or my mindset... isn’t that just the natural consequence of the fucking hand I was dealt!? —Isn’t it!?”

Satella: “———”

Subaru: “And it was you! You!!! You were the reason I became like this!!”

Shrieking, Subaru threw all his rage at Satella, who had kept her silence up to now as if to escape her culpability.

It was by accepting Return by Death, using its characteristics to overcome his obstacles, enduring all varieties of hardships that Subaru had made it this far. Tasting the despair of death, time and time again, letting it carve into his soul, turning it into his strength, Subaru got to where he was.

—And it was that same Natsuki Subaru's wound-ridden path that made him this way.

Subaru: "The one taking on the wounds, the one suffering...! It'll be me, all me, only me! If having me suffer is enough, then everything'll turn out great, won't it!? As long as I can hold it in, as long as I can bury the rage, the grief, everything, despair will NEVER touch anyone else, no matter how painfully I have to die! Throughout all of it, all the pain will fall only on me, and what is wrong with that!?!? How is anything to fault with that!?!?"

Repeat with Return by Death, and, through trial and error, reach the optimal future. It was just as Echidna said. But rather than accept Echidna's offer which would have her use that resolve to satisfy her own curiosity, he would continue to forge his path alone, just as he had always done.

Unlike Echidna, who would lure him into taking extra detours, if Subaru set his heart and mind to search for the optimal path, the number of retries would no doubt be less than if he went with her. Naturally he did expect for the retry count to be outrageous. But, even so, there was value in trying.

If at the other end of the bruise-laden Subaru's outstretched arm was a future where no one else would be hurt, then,

Subaru: "I said you are incomprehensible, that I'm sick of it, didn't I? Yeah, sorry, my bad. There was not a shred of dishonesty in that feeling... But I should've thanked you. How did I forget? I actually forgot, how utterly ungrateful of me."

Satella: "——"

Subaru: "There is just one thing I have to thank you for. Thanks, for giving me Return by Death. It is all thanks to you. Without it, I wouldn't be able to protect a single thing important to me. And now I'll be sure to keep relying on that power. So for that, and only that... I thank you."

He was prepared to continue with this continuous trial and error methodology. The option to flee from this fate had already been abolished a long time ago.

Ever since he said, “Take my hand, and run away with me” and was rejected, the option to flee was gone. He must fight on. For this was what he pledged, what she expected of him, and what she believed in him. Subaru will not run away but keep on fighting.

Subaru was the man who would always stand back up. Otherwise, he would no longer be Rem’s hero.

Subaru: “That’s why... Thank you for giving me this power. It’s thanks to you that this useless, worthless fool could turn those hopeless situ—”

Satella: “—Don’t.”

Subaru: “—ations...”

Just as Subaru was going to pour out all the heat that had been pent up in his chest, Satella broke her silence with a murmur. Hearing that single fragment, Subaru’s words dulled from their momentum. His face stiffened, waiting, begging to hear that whisper once more.

What did she say just now? It was like something he couldn’t bear to hear.

He held his breath, while Satella, after a brief silence, spoke again.

Satella: “—Please... Don’t cry. Don’t hurt. Don’t suffer. Don’t make... such a sad expression anymore.”

Pleading, Satella whispered to Subaru. Her words swept up violent tremors in his heart. Of rage, of shock, of a nondescript jumble of every emotion there is.

Subaru: “Y—you... W—what are...”

Overwhelmed by the maelstrom of emotions, he didn’t know what to say. Intense passion clogged up his throat as he merely opened and closed his mouth, staring at Satella.

Before the wavering Subaru, Satella continued with her sedition.

Satella: “And so, love...”

Subaru: “Is... Is that what it comes down to...? You want to twist my emotions until I finally love you? Is that what you...”

Satella: “—No.”

Satella interrupted Subaru’s trembling words. Her expression remained invisible. But, somehow, he could almost sense through his skin how Satella was looking at him behind that veil of shadow.

—Satella, she was,

Satella: “—Love yourself... a little more¹⁴².”

Surely, casting him a look of compassion—

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It took some time for the meaning of those words to filter into his brain.

But once it did, a shapeless, tremoring wave of emotion instantly engulfed his heart.

Subaru: “The hell... Did you just say.”

Satella: “...Please... Don’t hurt anymore. Be kinder to yourself.”

Subaru: “You... were the one who gave me Return by Death... weren’t you? You gave me this power, so I’d have a way to move forward...”

Satella: “—I love you. So, please, love yourself as well, and protect yourself.”

Subaru: “If you pity me and take this method away from me! What’ll I have left!?!?”

In rejection of Satella’s boundless whispers of love, Subaru screamed, pressing his hand against his chest,

¹⁴² In a very similar manner to what had happened previously on Volume 12, “愛して” (read “aishite”) is used, which can be understood to mean “love me” if there is no direct object of action, commonly “を”. However, this later phrase has “自分” (meaning yourself) indicated as the target of the action, which becomes “love yourself”. Japanese is fun!

Subaru: “You know it too, don’t you!? I’m completely powerless! No wits, no skill, I have no special powers at all! The only thing this good-for-nothing has is the Return by Death which you’ve given me! So isn’t my life the only thing I can offer!?”

Satella: “Don’t be sad.”

Subaru: “I’ve already factored in all the pain, all the deaths I am fated to experience. I’ve accepted it, I’m fine with it! If I’m the only one who’ll have to suffer, then I’m fine with that!”

Satella: “Don’t suffer anymore.”

Subaru: “Getting myself hurt more than anyone else, by going through more than anyone else, if I strive and struggle to protect everyone else, then I can make sure that no one besides me has to suffer! There’s nothing more that I want!”

Satella: “Please... don’t cry.”

Subaru: “It doesn’t matter what happens to me, does it!? Like anyone would be bothered to care what happens to a bastard like me! No matter how broken, how torn I become, as long as everyone reaches that future safely, then... hk.”

Because, if Subaru stops taking those wounds at the very front lines—

Subaru: “If we can welcome that future... without losing anyone... then... hk.”

—He might irrevocably lose someone somewhere unreachable again.

Subaru: “...Rem is... already gone.”

Satella: “———”

Subaru: “If I were smarter, if I were stronger, if I wasn’t so concerned about my life, if I had put myself in the front... It could’ve been avoided.”

The loss and the despair from back then, kept its binds on Natsuki Subaru still. And so, Subaru had resolved not to rely on anyone, but to carry his wounds, fighting on alone, believing this to be the most correct course.

Subaru: “I have to believe... I have to believe that there’s always a way...”

That Return by Death was a means that could solve everything.

That as long as he uses it well, Subaru will not lose a single thing in the end.

If he didn’t believe, if he didn’t tell himself that taking those wounds was necessary, if he didn’t convince himself that this was the truth, how could he possibly confront that despair again?

Subaru: “!...! I don’t want to lose anyone the way I lost Rem again— hk!”

Grabbing his head, Subaru shrieked as if to reject all other audible sound.

Before he knew it, he had crumpled to the ground. Forgetting even to distance himself from Satella, he retreated into his shell, curling up as he denied her sweet whispers.

Poison. Virulent poison. Satella’s very existence was a will-melting poison to Subaru.

Subaru’s heart, which he had sworn never to allow to falter, began to fracture.

Into that opened gap entered ice-cold despair, wrecking his heart with the reawakened grief of that day.

Sekhmet: “You aren’t a child anymore.”

Suddenly, there came a muttered voice. Seeing Subaru, wailing and crying, stubbornly insisting on his self-made conclusions and shaking his head in denial of all else, one of the Witches who had kept silent until now murmured.

Sekhmet: “Crying, bawling, throwing up a tantrum, taking everything onto yourself... Isn’t that, just like...”

Subaru: “———”

Sekhmet: “—a little, lonely child?”

In a sad, pitying voice, Sekhmet remarked on the current Subaru.

The other silent Witches who had heard Sekhmet’s murmur did not refute it.

The Witch of Sloth's words were all too accurate.

Because Subaru's figure now was just that of a pitiful, frail, little child.



Illustration from Volume 13, coloring by Setowi ([source](#))

Arc 4 Chapter 78 - These Sounds to Make You Shed Tears

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 13, Chapter 1 “The Sounds that Make You Want to Cry”, Parts 2 (halfway)-3

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken – [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

Sekhmet: “Curling up, being stubborn... Isn’t that just like a child? It’s so painful, I can’t bear watching, haa...”

Listening to Sekhmet calling him a child, Subaru, closed off in his shell, couldn’t help but think that maybe she was right. Obstinate and conceited, he was stubbornly shutting out the voices around him— But surely, his way would be the most reliable for minimizing losses.

Being granted an unlimited number of chances to rewind the world, with his life as the only price, Subaru could keep trying indefinitely. In the process, over and over, Subaru’s heart would steadily be abraded away.

But just when he was on the brink of shattering, he was given the words to make him stand again.

Rem: “—You are my hero, Subaru-kun.”

That. That was all he needed.

After his soul is finally worn to the core, if he could just hear those words with everyone there beside him, he would be satisfied. What’s so wrong with that?

???: “—Baru is crying-?”

Suddenly, a child’s voice pierced through the silence of the scene as the Witches held their breaths.

Curled into a ball, Subaru felt his head being caressed by a little palm. Glancing up through his teary vision, he saw the murky shape of a tan-skinned girl.

Subaru's gaze had landed on the Witch of Pride.

Typhon: "Poor Baru... He's cry-ing...Who made him cry-?"

The kneeling Typhon stood up, glowering at the other wordless Witches. A perilous gleam twirled in her eyes as she looked at each of the Witches in turn, then she raised her brows when she finally spotted Satella.

Typhon: "Tella? Tella's here? Why? It's been so long~"

Typhon waved as she called to Satella, but the war-like gleam in her eyes hadn't diminished. Seeing this, the first to address her was Sekhmet, who spilled a languid sigh as she sat up.

Sekhmet: "Typhon, haa... He's a bit occupied at the moment, huu... Don't bother the boy, haa. Come here, huu..."

Typhon: "Mama... did you do something bad to Baru? Mama... are you a sinner too-?"

Sekhmet: "Your mother, haa... doesn't have the energy to be a bad person, huu... I wouldn't want to give myself more work, haa... and I wouldn't want to give you more work either, huu."

Typhon gave a little nod at Sekhmet's answer, but showed no intention of moving away from Subaru like she was told. Instead, she turned to Minerva,

Typhon: "Nerva~~? Did you bully Ba... Nah~"

Minerva: "How come you are not asking me? It's not that absurd? It's not like I only ever go around healing people, sometimes I get carried away and abuse people emotionally too, you know... I mean, I... can hurt, people... too, sometimes..."

Echidna: "When your face turns pale just thinking about it, it's kind of hard to envision any violent act being committed by you..."

Echidna shrugged, teasing Minerva for her unconvincing reply. Minerva shot her a sharp glare, while Typhon also followed her gaze, turning to Echidna as her childish face twisted into a frown.

Typhon: “So it’s Dona. Dona, you did something bad again, didn’t you-? Dona... you are the baddie-?”

Echidna: “Now why is it that when you are asking me, it sounds a lot more like a conclusion rather than a question? I think I should have a word with your foster parent about that. So, what do you have to say?”

Sekhmet: “It’s to do with your daily behavior, haa...”

Saying this, Sekhmet languorously held her hand to her forehead. Without leaving Subaru’s side, Typhon was still intently searching for the sinner who made Subaru cry. Seeing the small Witch like this, Echidna narrowed her eyes, muttering “Anyway...”,

Echidna: “Now that Typhon’s here, we almost have everyone. If Daphne shows up as well, it’ll be just like four-hundred years ago...”

???: “Did... someone just call for Daphne...?”

In response to Echidna’s remark, a pitch-black coffin abruptly appeared on the meadow.

Inside, with her entire body in bondage and her eyes covered by blindfolds, was the Witch of Gluttony, Daphne. She made a little twitch with her nose, as if sniffing out all the people present.

Daphne: “Not just Subaruun... Tella-Tella’s here too? Woooooow... All seven Witches of Sin are here, even a Sage Candidate too...”¹⁴³

Echidna: “Daphne— He’s... not there yet.”

Daphne: “...Aaaaaaaah, really? Sorry... Anyway... Sniiiff~ sniiiff~, I smell something salty... is someone crying? Is it Neru-Neru?”

Without the slightest regard for the mood, Daphne went on poking at the tense situation in her dopey tone.

¹⁴³ Note from SummaryAnon: “Unclear if it should be «a Sage Candidate» or «the Sage Candidate»”.

To have all seven Witches, including Satella, gathered in the Dream Citadel must've been a rare sight even during the golden age of Witches four-hundred years ago. The Seven Witches of Sin who once thrust the world into chaos, present now in this livewire situation, powers liable to reshape the world itself were assembled together here.

The Witch of Pride, seeking to pass judgment upon the one who made the young boy cry.

The Witch of Wrath, clenching her fists, wishing that the feelings of the close friend at her side would bear fruit.

The Witch of Sloth, paying heed to everyone's movements, languidly prepared to instantly attack if anything should happen.

The Witch of Lust, keeping her uninvolved demeanor, ready to protect herself should the matters escalate in a flash.

The Witch of Gluttony, having already lost interest in what was happening around her, now agonizing over whose fingers to munch on to best stave off her hunger.

The Witch of Greed, directing her hostility toward one Witch in particular, while her eyes went on brimming with curiosity at just how this tea party shall unfold.

And, the one who was not the Witch of Envy, but Satella—

Satella: "I, love you— Because you gave me light. It was you who took me by the hand and showed me the world outside. In the nights when I was lonely and afraid, you stayed by my side with your hands around mine. And when I was all alone, you kissed me on the lips and told me that I wasn't. You've given me so, so much... That's why, I love you. Because you... you gave me everything."

Subaru: "——"

Subaru couldn't recall doing a single thing that Satella had whispered.

He had no part in it, it had nothing to do with him. Whether it was meeting Satella, trading words with her, or sharing a single feeling of warmth. Everything she is talking about is the fruits of her delusion.

This woman insane with sentiment had lined up empty daydreams where she simply watched a fantasy of Subaru.

That was how it should be. And yet, Natsuki Subaru remembered.

Subaru: “Why is this... inside me, what is this? I don’t want this feeling. Don’t try to bind me... with memories that can’t exist... you... you... I... Hk.”

“I hate you”, was all he needed to say.

All he had to do was stab the girl who offered him these feelings with the fact that he didn’t have the slightest affection for her. Once he does, he would be able to see the look on the face of the one who had selfishly sought to warp his heart. Surely, it would be an expression magnificently twisted by heartbreak.

—But, how are you even capable of doing that to her?

Typhon: “Baru?”

Sekhmet: “Oh, kid...”

Carmilla: “H—he’s...”

Minerva: “You... Tch.”

Daphne: “Subaruun?”

Echidna: “—Ah, well. That is yet another possible one option... Natsuki Subaru.”

As the Witches called to Subaru in turn, Echidna gave a small nod at this outcome.

Subaru: “—Guh, buh.”

—Just like this, curled up on the ground, Subaru had bitten off his own tongue.

Cornered by the Witches, he had no idea of anything anymore. With his heart on the brink of twisting, what was left for him to do, when he could no longer act of his own volition?

If it was just something he couldn't accept, he could have rejected it and it would've been fine. But, in front of Satella, when even his rejection was being turned into acceptance---

That very thought terrified Subaru.

---Now, just what would happen if you lose your life in a dream?

Subaru's body should still be in the Tomb inside the Sanctuary. What had been summoned here was Subaru's mental body, or you could even say his soul. If his spirit died here, would it carry over to his physical body? Could souls even die?

None of it mattered. If it meant another death and respawn, he'd be fine with that.

He would not take the Witches' help. Instead, he would move forward with even greater self-abandon, scouring away anything that wasn't necessary, and, if he could just stay true to his course, surely, the path would open--- If he were able to do just that, he...

Minerva: "That, idiot---!"

The instant she noticed Subaru's attempted suicide, Minerva rolled up her sleeves and jolted forward, hurrying to punch Subaru to heal him. But, cutting in front of her was Typhon, who had been standing at Subaru's side.

The small Witch stretched out her little body, blocking Minerva's path.

Typhon: "Baru made his own choice! Nerva, no interrupting!"

Minerva: "Self-harm or suicide or injury or murder, I won't allow any of it under my watch! I don't care what kind of anguish is going on inside! I can't do a thing about wounds that I can't see! That's why! There's no way I could ever overlook a wound that I can see!"

The ground caved in beneath her single step as Minerva's fist pierced through the wind, driving towards Typhon's face.

The shrieking fist advanced with enough force to rupture a mountain, but the moment it connects with a living being, the destruction would transform into healing. Although, the shockwave of the impact would still be transferred to the recipient of the strike.

Producing a resounding boom, Minerva's full-forced strike sent Typhon flying.

The prepubescent girl was blown away as easily as a leaf, dancing through the meadow's artificial sky. It was a rather brutal sight— but Typhon wasn't the only victim.

Minerva: “———Tch!”

Minerva's right arm, from her shoulder onwards, shattered like ice-crystals. This was the consequence of touching the judgment of the Witch of Pride, and thus being deemed a sinner.

Minerva tilted back her head in pain for the loss of her arm, opening her mouth wide to shriek——

Minerva: “A scratch——!!”

Or not.

Though she was sensitive to other people's pain, the Witch of Wrath completely disregarded her own. Even as she criticized Natsuki Subaru for his outlook, she was guilty of the same sin.

Minerva: “Anyway, now——!”

Having removed her obstacle, Minerva leaped towards Subaru, readying her remaining left arm. Aiming the mighty arm for a hit with the full brunt of her force from above,

Sekhmet: “I'll be getting in your way next... haa.”

In an instant, with her blonde hair fluttering, Minerva was slammed into the ground.

Her entire body pinned to the earth creating a person-shaped crater in the grass, Minerva lifted her face, flushed red with indignant fury, as she screamed at the seated Sekhmet.

Minerva: “Don't get in my way——! Sekhmet——!”

Sekhmet: “That won't do, huu. Sentimentally speaking, I'm on the kid's side, haa. Even more, I'm also on Typhon's side, huu... So I have no reason not to get in the way, haa...”

Hearing Sekhmet's declaration of war, Minerva ruefully bit her lip as she looked around her.

But Daphne and Carmilla were staying neutral in this conflict, and Echidna was merely watching with piqued interest for the outcome. And, Satella—

Satella: “Haa... haaaa...”

Crumbling to her knees, her voice trembled as she watched profuse blood spouting from Subaru’s mouth.

With his pouring blood and severed tongue clogging his throat, Subaru was experiencing the sensation of drowning as he caught Satella in a corner of his consciousness.

She’s crying, isn’t she?

Witnessing Subaru’s death, she looked more shaken than he had ever seen her before.

Satella: “Why can’t you understand...? That among all the things you want to protect, you should be included too.”

Why would she think this way about Subaru?

Within her delusions, just how much support did Subaru lend to her heart?

Satella: “Just like everyone else, struggling in the dead-end of fate, it should be the same for you too. Just because you alone have possibility of overturning it.... but... you need saving too... so why...?”

She was completely wrong.

Subaru was a hopeless bastard who couldn’t even hold onto the things within his grasp, much less capable of saving those he wished to save. A half-assed, useless prick. There was no escaping from that.

Had he not pledged? To escape from that, and to stop doing things halfway?

Had he not decided? To pretend to he was any better?

—That weak, useless self, and the self that no longer wanted to be weak were fighting inside him.

No one would see Natsuki Subaru’s weakness anymore.

He must become that strong, dignified, unshakable hero he needed to be.

Because there was a girl who wanted this from him. It was the curse he had placed upon her, and it was his duty to repay her for accepting that curse. Or, actually. It wasn't so much of a duty. It was just that, since that girl believed this about him, he wanted her to keep on believing.

Yes. That was it.

That was it.

If there was anyone who would grieve over Subaru's death, it would be her.

Choosing death was a betrayal of the girl who believed in him. Though of course, to Subaru, death would not be the end. Using death as a steppingstone, he would eliminate his cause of death and retrieve everything he had lost.

But what would this mean for the others whom Subaru had left behind, electing death in their stead?

He mustn't think about it.

He mustn't know it. Those were dangerous thoughts.

It was fine. Natsuki Subaru was fine just the way he was.

He mustn't think that anyone would grieve for him.

He wasn't someone worthy of such a thing. Subaru's life was a expendable resource. To be used, and used, and used, the very end was reached. That was all it was meant to be.

To use death without reservation to its greatest effect, he mustn't balk at his own death.

Be decisive. It's fine to think nothing. To take back what he needs to take back, he must be prepared to abandon what he has to abandon. Everyone does this. It's fine for Subaru to do this as well.

All that needed to be done was to save the ones precious to him. If he could do just that, Subaru—

Satella: "What did you see... in the Second Trial...?"

The Trial— The Trial. The Trial, Trial. TrialTrial Trial, TrialTrialTrialTrial, Trial—?

Shock and deprivation of oxygen had slowed his thoughts to their limits.

His vision blurred and blurred into a flickering red, as a storm of television noise ran through his mind. “It’s about time this ended”, he vaguely thought.

The end was slowly approaching.

How many times was it now, that he had welcomed death like this? It was far too tiresome to count, but that was fine.

Eventually, he would have repeated deaths so many times, that counting would become sickening.

He didn’t think he could stay conscious long enough to count all the deaths anyway.

That heart of steel.

To have, that unshakable, heart of steel—

Slowly, and slowly, Subaru’s consciousness departed.

And faded,

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???: *“I’m counting on you, son.”*

A voice.

Through the noise, and through the rebounding cacophony, he heard a horrifically clear voice.

???: *“—Have a safe trip.”*

He heard another.

A different voice. But it brought the same emotions to his chest.

???: *“I would have liked to call you friend.”*

Another voice, bringing a different feeling.

Somehow, it agitated him to hear it. But there was also something pleasant to it.

???: *"Subaru-dono... please forgive me..."*

Yet another voice.

Flooding his chest with a passing loneliness and had a tinge of longing to it. A voice he wanted to apologize to.

???: *"You... aren't, that person... I know that... at least... but..."*

Here was a voice that gripped at his chest.

Hearing this voice, he could no longer control himself. This voice, that was about to cry. This voice mustn't be allowed to cry. This voice he must protect. This voice. This voice. This voice.

???: *"So show me how amazing you can be. Subaru-kun."*

Thud, something thumped inside him in answer to this voice.

His body heated up. Compelled by a sense of duty to move. At this voice that had always supported him. And,

???: *"Thank you, Subaru."*

There came a voice.

???: *"—For saving me."*

—The voice that announced the beginning of everything.

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He was probably crying.

If the people dear to him learned about his death, would they grieve for him?

Those irreplaceable people left behind in the worlds that Subaru had selfishly escaped through death, would they mourn and grieve for him?

Just as Subaru was lamenting his own weakness, repeating through Return by Death in search of the perfect future, those who lost him in the final step— would they mourn for him as well?

The people who were precious to him. The people he believed he must protect. The people he undoubtedly wished to rescue from their fate's dead-end.

—Was he worthy of being mourned by those so precious to him?

It's alright to be a little conceited, isn't it? To be so conceited as to think that I'm also precious to the people I consider precious.

It's alright to have a little faith, isn't it? To believe that those I want to protect also want to protect me as well.

I'm allowed to have a little hope too, aren't I? That someone would shed tears if I died and see me as important enough to reach out their hand to save me.

—It's alright for me to think this, isn't it?

I don't want to die.

I don't want to give up, as if this is the only way.

I don't want to be a steppingstone, even if it means saving the futures of people I love.

In that future where I've protected all of them, I want to be there too.

It's alright for me to think like this, isn't it?

I... have the right too... Don't I?

If I do, then—

Subaru: “I don’t... wanna die...”

Gurgling through the clotting blood, alongside the escaping air, he spoke.

The severed tongue clogging his throat broke free, as his mouth opened and closed, gasping for air. His lungs expanded, oxygen cycled through his brain anew, and his murky vision began to be restored. Then,

Minerva: “There, those are his real thoughts... Kuh!”

—Despite having lost both her legs, fueled on willpower alone, the red-flushed Witch of Wrath rammed her healing head into Subaru’s.

Arc 4 Chapter 79 - End of the Dream

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 13, Chapter 1 “The Sounds that Make You Want to Cry”, Part 4

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

The moment he realized that oxygen was passing through his windpipe, with a massive cough Subaru expelled the remaining blood clotting in his throat.

Still collapsed face-up on the ground, pant after pant, he gasped for the nourishment of life.

There was no time to think about how wretched he looked now. Although, he was well aware of how miserable it was to unhesitatingly cling to the first chance of rescue right after biting off his own tongue to die. But,

Subaru: “...Does my...”

Minerva: “—Hm?”

Subaru: “Does my life... have any value...? Besides dying... without dying over and over... do I value besides that...?”

Return by Death, and in doing so, save everyone from the depths of despair.

He had believed that paying with his life to attain this outcome was Natsuki Subaru’s only value.

But, would it be alright to think otherwise?

Subaru: “Is it alright... to think that this person that I am... has any value besides Return by Death? To think that... the people I care about... care about me... as well?”

Minerva: “...The hell would I know.”

Minerva looked away and shot down Subaru's whimpering question.

Having lost her right arm and both her legs, she used her left arm to shuffle away from Subaru. Then, aiming her face at her right shoulder— she bit down. Immediately, Minerva's missing right arm regenerated from droplets of light.

Opening and closing her restored right fist, Minerva proceeded to punching her legs— both missing from the thigh down, which, just like her arm, were formed anew. Her already short skirt had been shaved even shorter and her right arm was now entirely exposed, but, other than her rather precarious costume, the Witch of Wrath Minerva was restored to perfect condition.

She stood up on her brand-new legs, crossing her arms in a pose that propped up her ample breasts, and looked down on Subaru. Then,

Minerva: "I couldn't care less whether you have value or not. But she really wants you to live... And you've seen it in the Second Trial too, haven't you?"

Subaru: "...But the Second Trial... were my mistakes... and my sins..."

Minerva: "Are you stupid? That wasn't about making you take responsibility for the worlds in which you messed up. That was to show you how sad everyone is as the result of your mistakes— Isn't that the answer you wanted?"

Subaru: "———Oh."

He remembered it.

The voice that was crying. The voice stifling its regret. The voice gently sending him off as always. The whisper of love from someone who believed in him. And the words that began everything which would become Subaru's will to fight.

None of which he was supposed to have in his life. Having nothing, deprived of even what he should have had, Subaru was summoned to this world.

To prove his own worth, he needed to keep fighting. To protect those precious people that became dear to him over that period of fighting, he needed to keep walking further in solitude.

I thought that I've only ever been receiving from others, but is it alright to think otherwise?

Would they cry, for me?

Would they lament their own powerlessness, for me?

Would they want to see that future together with me?

When we get there, those people that I love, would they give me a place to stand smiling at their side?

He wasn't sure if he'd have that place. But surely, if he chose to stubbornly walk that road alone, at the end, that place would not be there for him. His heart, which would have been turned to steel so he could fight with an unshakable will, would have no tenderness left to smile.

And so, was it really alright to believe?

The option to procure a future for those precious to him, at cost of losing his own heart.

The option to frantically guard his own heart, at the cost of losing the road to proceed.

Was he allowed to believe in neither and instead in some greedier option?

The option to see the future of those precious ones, while simultaneously remaining as Natsuki Subaru, was an option that existed— Was he allowed to desire this, to believe this?

Satella: “—You are.”

Subaru: “———”

Shedding only tears, those had been Subaru's unvoiced thoughts. But the timing of that answer was so perfect that it was as if those words had been communicated in sound.

Still lying on the ground, Subaru moved his head to look beyond Minerva— towards the face of the girl who had collapsed to her knees on the grass, smiling without wiping away her tears.

He still couldn't see her face. A veil of darkness was concealing it, such that even now, Subaru couldn't determine her expression. Yet, somehow, he knew that she was smiling.

Echidna had told him. The reason Subaru couldn't see her face was because he could not accept her. The fact that she was smiling came through, but his subconscious was insisting that he didn't see it.

Satella: "You saved me. And so, I permit you be saved as well. I want you... to be saved."

Acutely aware of Satella's words and voice seeping into his fractured heart, Subaru buried his face in his arms. It must be a mess from all the tears, and there was already no way he could look more pathetic at this point. But still, he wished to stop anyone from seeing it.

Even after lashing her with that merciless abuse, how was it that he could still feel relieved to hear Satella's words? And how could he possibly let them see how much his expression had calmed?

But the fact remained that Satella's inexplicable words of love conveyed to Subaru the true meaning of the Trial.

Echidna: "...I'm surprised Minerva managed to break through Typhon and Sekhmet's obstruction, but, personally, what surprised me even more is you two."

Setting aside Subaru, who was hiding his face, Echidna quietly murmured.

After looking at Minerva, who had regenerated herself, Echidna turned her gaze elsewhere— Towards the pitch-black coffin pinning Typhon to the ground with its claws, and the coffin's owner, Daphne, facing down Sekhmet.

Hearing Echidna's words, Daphne let out a throaty cackle. She opened the lower half of her bondage and stepped barefoot onto the grass, poking out her tongue,

Daphne: "I'm definitely the best counter to Ty-Ty there iiiiiiis... The Centipede Coffin has no head to think with... Using that as Daphne's arms and leeeegs, Ty-Ty's authority won't work on meeeeeee..."

Typhon: "Uuuu, Phinnieeee cut it oooout! Hnnn! Uuuuuu!"

Sekhmet: "So, haa... You've shown your true colors to keep me in check? Huu. I'm not Echidna, haa. Why bother pulling this on me? Huu... Unlike Minerva, I don't see why you'd want to get involved, haa."

Sekhmet roughly scratched her overabundant hair. With Typhon practically taken hostage, even Sekhmet couldn't act carelessly here.

Hearing Sekhmet's question, Daphne swayed her short pigtails and smiled with a "Weeeell",

Daphne: "Subaruun, he claimed some pretty big things to Daphneeee. Something about killing the White Whale, and then the Great Rabbit neeext? Soooo I was thinkiing I want him to at least live long enough to take them ooon~"

Echidna: "That's an interesting perspective. If he sets his mind to it, he will certainly achieve it. You realize this, don't you...? Or do you actually want the Great Rabbit to be destroyed?"

Daphne: "Whateveeeeeer? The moment it split away from Daphneee, its belly has nothing to do with Daphne's belly anymoreee. Whether it gets destroyed or not won't really bother meee... but I am interested to see how the Great Rabbit representing Daphne's insatiable hunger would come to an eeend~"

"After all", Daphne went on,

Daphne: "If to end is to be satisfieeeee... That would be a happiness completely unknown to meee~"

Constantly tormented by endless hunger, to Daphne, its fulfillment would eternally be an unreachable dream. The Great Rabbit was a reflection of her everlasting hunger, and perhaps, even an extension of herself— Although, Daphne herself completely lacked this sense of intimacy with it.

If the Great Rabbit were to meet a different end than what she had received, could it be called fulfillment? Was there ever hope that she would ever be satisfied? With this rare display of interest in something other than food, she smiled.

Hearing Daphne's answer, Echidna gave a nod of gratification, and turned her head yet again. Not to Subaru, Satella, or Minerva. Nor Daphne nor Sekhmet nor Typhon, but to someone who, like Echidna herself, had stayed somewhere isolated from the fray.

Looking at the Witch of Lust, Carmilla, Echidna softly stroked her own white hair,

Echidna: "And what about you, Carmilla? Did you have a reason like Daphne?"

Carmilla: "I—is, there... something you are trying to... say? E—Echidna... -chan...?"

Echidna: “It’s simple— You called to his consciousness when he was on the brink of death, just when it was about to be extinguished. With your Authority, Faceless Goddess, you must have known what the result would be.”

Carmilla: “———”

Echidna: “Your call would have held every significance for him. You must have known this. Hence the reason to my question. You don’t seem to have any fondness for him, so why did you?”

Listening to Echidna’s question, Carmilla held her hands to her lips as her eyes pattered about. She glanced towards Daphne and Minerva, as if hoping for someone other than herself to come and back her up. But there was no Witch on site who would be seduced by the all-beloved Carmilla.

Helpless, Carmilla began biting her fingernails, looking at Echidna with watery eyes.

Carmilla: “There, was... no, rea...son? He, rejected... E—Echidna-chan’s temptations, so, I’m, already, satisfied... and, everyone, started, fighting for some, reason... But, that has nothing, to do with, me... only...”

Echidna: “Only?”

Carmilla: “L—love, is, a pretty big...deal, you know? It’d be, wrong, to... ig—ignore it. He, doesn’t... want to, see it, but, there, is love, there... and when, it’s, there... I won’t allow it, to be denied. And, I... absolutely despise taking without giving.”

Hearing only the last part spoken with terrifying clarity, Echidna shrugged. The Witch of Greed gave a wry smile, before looking to each of the other Witches in turn,

Echidna: “Sekhmet and Typhon respected his will and intervened, while Minerva valued life and healed him. Daphne helped prolong his life so she could see his will to fight, and Carmilla used her Authority to inform him of the love he was refusing to see— And so, everyone here, for their own varying reasons, has decided to help Natsuki Subaru.”

Listening to Echidna’s appraisal of their actions, all the Witches’ expressions changed. Pride tilted her head, Sloth spilled a languid sigh, Wrath snorted and folded her arms, Gluttony munched on one of her coffin’s extended legs and smiled, while Lust unhappily scowled.

And, taking all this into her sight, Greed held a hand to her jaw,

Echidna: “It’s truly fascinating— Don’t you agree?”

Echidna’s lips softened as a blissful smile rose on her face, her words aimed at the one directly in front of her— at Subaru, wavering as he stood up.

Having wiped away his tear tracks with his sleeve, only now finally managing to stand, Subaru did not respond to Echidna’s question. He merely looked, first at her, then over the other Witches, with a passionless gaze. And,

Subaru: “Just what... are you people.”

Witches: “———”

Subaru: “Curiosity. Sympathy. Pity. Duty. Expectation. Disgust... None of your reasons for helping me make any sense to me. I guess I can see why you are called Witches.”

Echidna: “Since you are back to throwing insults, perhaps that means you’ve perhaps regained your spirit?”

Subaru: “...I don’t know.”

Echidna squinted a single eye while Subaru pressed a hand to his chest and muttered. Those few spilled words perfectly encompassed all of Subaru’s present feelings.

Subaru: “I was supposed to have decided... what I have to do. The things I must do haven’t changed. That much is certain. That’s certain...”

“But”, he went on, more to himself than to anyone else,

Subaru: “I had already decided that this was the only way. That was what I chose... what I’ve resolved to choose. And yet, here, the Trial shattered all of that.”

The Second Trial, the presents that were not to be, stuck the products of his actions right in his face, as reality settled in— He could no longer use the word “resolve” to divert his heart from those consequences, which ripped it to shreds.

Being forced to witness all that, Subaru would have tried to put it behind him, and to push through with said resolve. In fact, that was what should have happened.

Subaru: “But when I learned of your reasons for helping me, and then having Satella appear right after... My head is a total mess. All of you, just stop going off, doing all these things. What I ought to do is something I alone am saddled with. That’s how it’s meant to be, but...”

At this point, how was he supposed to start clinging to the life he had already decided to treat as expendable?

At this point, how was he supposed to start valuing the life that was meant to be used to its utmost?

At this point, what could he possibly do with the knowledge that he was being loved?

Subaru: “I have... no idea... what to do anymore.”

“You can’t protect anyone if you can’t die”, Subaru’s rationality was screaming.

“There’s someone who’ll be saddened if you hurt yourself like this”, Subaru’s memories were telling him.

People will suffer if he doesn’t die, and people will suffer if he does.

Echidna: “—I will present you this question once again, Natsuki Subaru.”

As Subaru shook his head in indecision, Echidna lowered her tone and said.

Looking up, he saw Echidna raise a single finger in front of him. Seeing herself reflected within Subaru’s eyes, she slowly nodded,

Echidna: “Should you enlist my help, you will, without fail, reach the future where everyone you wish to save will be saved. There will be no more need for worry. Speaking in extremes, I will solve all the problems you’ll face in your stead. All you’ll need to do is focus on implementing those solutions, and on overcoming those obstacles. If this constant burden is too painful for you, you have the option of entrust me with all of it. I won’t fault you for it, and, in a sense, I’d welcome it. And so, I present you this question once again.”

Subaru: “———”

Echidna: “Lost and without knowing where to go, will you let me guide your hand? I will, without fail, bring you to that future. This, I promise you.”

Saying this gently, Echidna reached out her hand to Subaru.

Looking down at Echidna’s white fingers, then looking up at her awaiting face, Subaru’s breath froze. Those were the same words he had just rejected.

Back when Subaru first learned of Echidna’s true nature, he had been terrified by that morbid curiosity driving her. But, what about now? Now that some time had passed for him to quietly reflect on her words, how about it?

Treating his life as expendable, attempting every form of trial and error, using brute force to break through the obstacles standing in his path. Between accepting Echidna’s guidance, fighting on at the cost of his heart— and declining her help, resolving to struggle alone, what difference is there?

It was out of a stubborn impulse of the moment, a knee-jerk revulsion at her attitude, that Subaru had rejected her.

But if he truly had the resolve to abandon everything and use himself as the sacrifice, if he could just overlook Echidna’s nature, then why shouldn’t he use her just as she had proposed? Refusing her out of self-righteous morality only to continue down the exact same path— What point is there in this obstinacy?

He should take that hand.

If he had the resolve to swallow all the pain and suffering, and fight on without fear of getting hurt, then he should take that hand. And so,

Subaru: “Echidna.”

Echidna: “———”

Subaru: “I’m... afraid of getting hurt.”

Echidna: “———”

Subaru: “I hate pain and suffering and grief. I don’t want to go through those awful experiences, and I don’t want to see others suffer those terrible fates—— I don’t, want to die.”

Echidna: “———”

Subaru: “And so, your hand that presupposes sacrifice—— I can’t take it anymore.”

Even Subaru wasn’t sure what he could do by himself.

But it seems that he could no longer choose the path that Echidna had pointed out.

He had realized that he didn’t want to die.

He had learned that, even as he thought that death was his only contribution, there were those who would accept him even if he didn’t die.

Natsuki Subaru wasn’t a man whose only value is in death. The people who grieved for him weren’t doing so because they saw value in Subaru’s death.

But then, just what did they see in him that made them grieve for him?

Subaru: “I still don’t know what they saw—— But, I intend to find out. I get the feeling that once I find out what it is, I’ll be able to repay everyone in a way other than death.”

Echidna: “...But there lies a thorny path, Natsuki Subaru. Using death as your tool to cut open the way, scouring yourself down to proceed along that road, that would no doubt be the shortest path, albeit a treacherous one. The only thing you’d need to offer is your heart. To deny this, and intend to keep your own heart as well as the future of those precious to you, is an act of extraordinary difficulty, and above all——”

Here, Echidna paused for a breath.

Then, with the most resplendent smile he had ever seen on her face,

Echidna: “——Greed.”

Affirming his desires, the Witch of Greed received Subaru's decision with a contented expression.

Alas, having been rejected, this Witch was still happily smiling. It's not something Subaru could understand at all, but,

Subaru: "The truth is that you've already saved me countless times... Even if, deep down, you were thinking of me as some kind of lab animal... that's still the truth."

By being there, Echidna had been a support for his heart, and helped him through those difficult times. And so, for granting him that reprieve to keep hold of his heart, he was indeed grateful to her.

Echidna: "—That foolish, pitiful Garfiel is scared of the outside world."

Subaru: "...Huh?"

Echidna: "What that child saw in the First Trial has always been binding him. If you are to break through this situation yourself, you will need to undo that curse."

Subaru: "Echidna?"

Echidna: "The other Witches have all done something nice for you, so if I don't give you something as well, what'll you think of me? I wouldn't want you to think «The Witches were all fundamentally great guys, except that Echidna, she was just the worst». I am a girl, after all, and I am rather fond of you."

Quickly saying this, Echidna lightly poked Subaru in the chest.

Pushed back a step by the momentum, when Subaru looked up again, Echidna had already turned her face away. With her white hair swaying, the Witch of Greed stepped away from Subaru.

The other Witches too, were quietly watching Subaru.

Subaru: "...I just can't understand you guys at all."

Witches: "——"

Subaru: “You guys drive me crazy, messing with my head like that, and I’m still kinda pissed about what you said. All that time I kept thinking «Stop talking over my head about things I don’t understand», I seriously can’t stand you guys...”

That was the truth. The Witches all had their own unyielding ideals that were beyond what Subaru—or any normal person could comprehend. And so, Subaru couldn’t understand them, or agree with their actions.

But just like his feelings towards Echidna, understanding and gratitude were separate things.

Subaru: “Thank you... for letting me die. Thank you... for not letting me die. And thank you, for letting me hear those important voices— For these, thank you.”

He bowed his head to each of the Witches in turn, deriving some small pleasure from the way they each swallowed their breaths.

Then, Subaru turned around, and walked forward. Ahead of him, was the girl still kneeling on the grass— Satella.

She looked up at his approach, holding her breath as though her throat had frozen.

Seeing her frightened, sitting there like a small, little girl, Subaru lost his words.

Why was it that, when faced with someone he had thought abhorrent, his heart was filled with warmth?

What were those emotions he was harboring inside him for someone he had never touched before?

Subaru had received far too many unanswerable questions since he got here.

Still without a single answer, choosing only to continue struggling, Subaru extended his hand to the Witch on the ground. She looked at his offered hand, lost and uncertain.

Subaru: “I... don’t know who you are. I don’t know why you are telling me that you love me, or what you meant... when you said that I had saved you.”

Satella: “Ah...”

Subaru: “But, this Return by Death you’ve given me has saved me, that’s a fact. It was all thanks to it, that I’ve managed to get this far. That’s the truth.”

Satella: “———”

Subaru: “Return by Death is just an option available to me... Right?”

Satella: “———”

Subaru: “I shouldn’t rely on it entirely, I should love myself a little more... That’s what you said, right?”

Satella: “———”

Subaru: “I won’t pretend there’s an easy solution— But you... the one who gave me Return by Death... You don’t want me to die. I know that for certain now.”

And so,

Subaru: “Like you said, I’ll try to... be a little kinder to myself. And to cherish myself. I have no idea what’ll happen if I start doing that... But that’s okay.”

Satella: “...Will you be alright?”

Subaru: “Yeah... Compared to dying, that’s nothing.”

In answer to Satella’s worried voice, Subaru did his best to manage a weak smile.

As if relieved to see his expression, Satella took hold of Subaru’s hand.

Instantly, the sound of the world breaking fell upon Subaru’s eardrums. The blue sky and the green grass fields began to fade in color as Natsuki Subaru was being released from the Citadel of Dreams.

Subaru: “—I’m leaving, then?”

He could no longer remember how, or why, he came here.

What would he do first when he gets outside? For reasons inside his heart, even that was unclear.

Satella: “Don’t... struggle on alone. Do it alongside the people who care about you...”

Subaru: “———”

Satella: “These people who don’t want you to die, these people who don’t want to let you die, fight alongside them... And when even that isn’t enough, die without forgetting what it is to fear death.”

Subaru: “———”

Satella: “Don’t forget... that there are people who would grieve your death——”

The world was cracking into pieces. Satella’s voice was growing distant. A fact that tore at Subaru’s heart. The palm in his hand was frightfully hot.

But he mustn’t let it go, he felt.

Subaru: “——I”

He couldn’t form the words to call to her. He couldn’t make the sounds to call her name. Satella, that name mustn’t escape his lips. His desire to reject her was fighting with his desire to accept her.

The sky was falling. The earth was breaking. Light flooded through until his surroundings were no longer the Citadel of Dreams. The other Witches had disappeared, leaving only Subaru and Satella in this world.

All was fading. And starting anew.

——Subaru only went on gazing at Satella in front of him, unable to say a thing.

Subaru: “———”

Suddenly, the veil of darkness fell. The impenetrable shadow, the one his subconscious rejection insisted was obstructing his view, was dispelled.

And, when he saw the face behind it, Subaru’s breathing ceased.

Before the breathless Subaru, Satella’s silver hair was swaying, while tears were falling from the edges of her narrowing, amethyst eyes——

Satella: “And one day— no matter what, you must kill me.”

Fading.

Disappearing.

The world was wiped away, and even the girl before his eyes had vanished.

Subaru: “I, no matter what—”

Only, clenching tight onto the certain, lingering warmth on his palm,

Subaru: “—Will definitely save you.”

He said to that vanished, beloved girl.



Illustration from Volume 13, coloring by Setowi ([source](#))

Arc 4 Intermission II - The Guest of Honor Has Left

Has been cut from the Light Novel Adaptation

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Complete](#)

Sekhmet: “Was it really alright, haa. Letting them leave like that, huu?”

Echidna: “It was his decision, his choice. I would like to respect that... Although, I can’t say I don’t have a thought or two about the way he left holding that thing’s hand.”

Echidna shrugged in response to Sekhmet’s listless voice.

Just as always, they were inside the Citadel of Dreams with its grass fields and blue skies unchanged. A cool wind scraped by, gently caressing the Witches’ hair.

—After the fracturing world swallowed Subaru and Satella, releasing them from the Dream, the world was formed anew.

Well, of course. This indestructible space was woven from Echidna’s soul, and so long as Echidna exists, it too would persist in this state. What transpired had been nothing more than an extravagant send-off for the guests who were leaving.

Echidna: “Still, when you fire off your ability all over like that, I can’t help but end up drained, you know. It would be appreciated if you could exercise a little moderation with your rampant healing.”

Minerva: “I follow my creed, if I see an injury, I heal it. Be it humans, Witches, animals, birds, fish, bugs, or Witchbeasts, it makes no difference, any wound on a living being is my enemy!”

Echidna: “Yes, but, unlike in life, everything you do here is a burden on me. When you were alive, it was the world that had to shoulder that burden, but now that’s all on me, can you imagine how tough that is to bear alone?”

Minerva: “Burden or whatever, I couldn’t care less about stuff that I can’t see. I heal wounds. If it shortens the lifespan of the world or something, that’s not my problem.”

Minerva crossed her arms, propping up her ample breasts, while the other two Witches wryly smiled. At first glance, the Witch of Wrath Minerva might seem like the most amicable of the Witches of Sin— Or at least, the most harmless of the Witches. In fact, her actions consisted entirely of healing, and the number of lives she saved in her lifetime must have surpassed the tens of thousands.

—However, Minerva’s seemingly harmless healing was indirectly causing equivalent damage to the world.

The destructive energy of every punch, kick, and bite would transform into healing in Minerva’s hands. This being the mechanism of the Authority of Wrath, no one besides Minerva could perform it. Even Echidna, who could understand its construction, could not replicate it.

Minerva’s healing attacks could bring lifeforms back from the brink of death— But to think that this Authority was all-powerful would be a mistake.

The healing power triggered by her fists was the result of a mechanism which forcibly twisted cause and effect, expending incredible amounts of Mana to activate. The Mana required far exceeded the capacity of humans, and, even for a Witch, Minerva could not possibly manage it alone.

In that case, where did the Mana for her strikes come from? —The answer is simple. It was stolen from the very Nexus of the world.

Ordinarily, when humans use magic, it is done by drawing Mana from the atmosphere through their gate, converting it into magical energy, and then releasing it once more as spells. In Minerva’s case, her gate was not linked to the atmosphere, but directly to the Nexus of the world. Said in more complicated terms, the Nexus of the world is a great, transcendental concentration of Mana— One might even say that it is the place where Mana is born.

Minerva’s strikes were drawing Mana from precisely that to convert her attacks into healing. By repeatedly doing this, the Mana that should originally be provisioning some other place in the world would never reach it. With a starvation of the Mana, important in upholding the world’s fundamental

structures, an extremely dangerous possibility is then born— These unsupplied regions were to suffer natural disasters and calamities.

She may have healed over tens of thousands with her punches.

—But, in the natural disasters indirectly caused by her actions, just as many would have lost their lives.

Therefore, the Witch of Wrath Minerva was among the most dangerous of the Witches bearing the names of Sins, such that she was regarded as an enemy of every nation.

Minerva: “All I can do in here is draw up whatever Mana you have, Echidna. I can barely cure or heal anything even if I suck you dry, that’s so lame.”

Echidna: “There shouldn’t have been anyone getting hurt in here in the first place. But with all the ruckus that’s gone on here lately you could almost forget that.”

Minerva: “Right... Yeah. It was pretty rowdy, for a little while.”

Echidna’s words somewhat doused Minerva’s intensity. Her adorable face took on a visible shade of gloom as the blond-haired Witch looked up to the sky,

Minerva: “You think he’ll be alright? I’m getting super worried.”

Echidna: “You can rest assured. Since he’s rejected my hand, he will be struggling with everything he’s got to make sure that he succeeds. Although, he doesn’t seem to have an answer yet.”

Minerva: “What’s with that phrasing? You guided him so that he’d reject you, and then you are trying to hide that from us, when we know what you are really thinking? What’s the point of that!?”

Echidna: “It’s not that I was trying to be rejected— Since whether he declined or accepted, I would’ve been glad either way.”

Answering Minerva’s objection, Echidna sat herself down at the regenerated table. Clicking her fingers, she produced a teacup. Then, bringing the steaming cup to her lips,

Echidna: “I will affirm whatever choice he makes. And I don’t see any problem with what results from that choice. The fact that he chose it, or the fact that he didn’t choose it— That’s the important part. Whether the outcome is good or bad, I’m rather proud of my ability to be happy with either.”

Daphne: “Buuuut, that doesn’t mean you don’t have preferenceees~”

As Echidna brought the tea to her lips, a pitch-black coffin came inching up beside her. Daphne, who had settled herself inside her coffin once more, was attracted over by the assorted sweets on the table.

Daphne: “You say you respect the outcomeeees, but Dona-Dona doesn’t hesitate to manipulate things towards the results she wants to see, does sheeee? It’s probably true that you’d be glad either waaaay, but it isn’t true that there isn’t one you wanted, is iiiit?”

Echidna: “You barely have any interest in others, yet you always hit things right on the mark, don’t you, Daphne.”

Daphne: “Compared to the constant hunger on my miiiiind, I don’t really get caught up on the unimportant stuff. Haaa, haaaa, munchmunch~”

Munching straight through the sweets, Daphne ate up the plate as well. Seeing this, Echidna sighed before looking over the other Witches who were now taking their seats at the table.

Languid, visibly indignant, timid— and one with a particularly perilous gaze.

Echidna: “Well you sure look angry, Typhon.”

Typhon: “Because Dona wasn’t honest... Not being honest... means you are a liar? And liars... are baddies? Dona... Are you a baddieeee?”

Echidna: “I act sincerely in accordance to what it is I want. Telling lies is something I have no present recollection of doing.”

Unfazed, Echidna answered Typhon’s innocently blunt question. Echidna’s roundabout phrasing would probably have been lost on the young Typhon. After all, Echidna knew that if she really got on Typhon’s bad side, everyone present would be in terrible danger.

Condemning criminals and judging sinners amounted to just a fraction of Typhon’s Authority of Pride.

But, seeing Typhon puff up her cheeks assenting to Echidna's careful mental gymnastics, the next to speak was the Witch buried under a ball of hair.

Sekhmet: "Speaking while hiding your true intentions while speaking, haa... isn't exactly lying... How convenient for you... huu."

Carmilla: "E—Echidna-chan, is, really... just hopeless, isn't she..."

Echidna: "You two..."

Seeing Echidna scowl at being caught in the concentrated barrage, the other Witches smiled. The only one still sulking was Minerva, glaring at her with the corner of her eyes tilted up.

Sekhmet: "Minerva too, how long are you gonna stay grumpy about it, haa. Didn't we all agree before-hand, huu? You knew we'd be doing this whenever a Sage Candidate¹⁴⁴ arrived, haa."

Minerva: "Ugh, I know, I know. I'm saying I agree with having a real talk. Just, unlike you guys, I'm not in a position where I'm able rationalize it. I'd like you to understand that."

Daphne: "Met-Met's always sticking with Ty-Ty, she wouldn't understaaaand. You guys spend too much of your life worrying about stuff that isn't eatiing. It's such a waste, isn't iiiit?"

Daphne juttet in, prompting a snort of displeasure from both Minerva and Sekhmet.

While this tea party between Witches did preserve a kind of equilibrium, all its attendants were still people with egotistic dispositions. More often than not, they failed to see eye-to-eye with each other, and spats like this one were not rare at all.

Especially between Minerva, prone to jabbing out at anyone, and Sekhmet, who dislikes conflict, had more than a few verbal skirmishes. Every time, Daphne would get between them by striking to the heart of the matter with one of her tone-deaf comments. And more often than not, the conversations would end like this with no real conclusions being made.

¹⁴⁴ Much like earlier, it is unclear if it should be «a Sage Candidate» or «the Sage Candidate».

Minerva gets mad, Sekhmet entertains her conversation, Daphne comes in teasing, Carmilla soothes Typhon so she doesn't explode, and Echidna watches happily from the side— All the while Satella watches over them, smiling to see that all six are safe.

Those were the days from four-hundred years ago, never to come again.

Satella was driven mad because of the Witch Factor; Minerva died of insanity, caught in a trap; Carmilla perished in a sea of flames; Daphne wasted to death amid an ocean of sand; Typhon drowned in a flood; Sekhmet fell down the Great Waterfall as she rained destruction upon the Dragon; Echidna collected their souls, remaining bound to the present world by soul alone.

This was but an imperfect reproduction of those forever-gone days.

Carmilla: "You look, sad... Echidna... chan...? You look, really... sad?"

Echidna: "Why's that? I have no reason to be sad. You are all here with me, and I've have my chances to interact with the outside world— Why would I be sad?"

Carmilla: "Is, that, really alright? W—we are, just... souls, and, so, it's not really us, ri—right? We, are... hmm, al—already... dead. We can't, really, be together with, Echidna-chan, anymore, right...?"

Carmilla's stuttering words struck Echidna silent for a moment.

—It was Echidna's powers that had given the Witches, who had lost their bodies and existed only as souls, these temporary bodies in the form of mental constructs. She had prepared the vessels and housed their souls inside them.

But their souls were frozen at the time of their death, without a single change afterwards. So was the Carmilla that Echidna was seeing now truly Carmilla herself?

Drawing reactions that they've made in life from their souls, and using them to animate these bodies— Was this just a game of dolls instigated by Echidna's own desires?

The Witches did share Echidna's knowledge. And how to explain that if not with the statement that their existences were produced from inside Echidna? —This was a query Echidna had mused over countless times already.

Echidna: “Being the bundle of narcissism that you are, though I am a friend, it’s quite unusual for you to worry about me... Don’t tell me his boisterous, soft-headed personality has rubbed off on you?”

Carmilla: “I, wouldn’t... know, anything, about, that... Echidna-chan... You dummy.”

In front of Echidna’s self-distracting answer, Carmilla muttered with a despondent expression.

Hearing her reply, Echidna couldn’t help but burst out laughing.

Seeing Echidna like this, the other Witches, who had not been paying attention up to now, all turned to look at her. And, showered in all their gazes, Echidna spread out her arms,

Echidna: “Now, the tea party will go back to just being us Witches for a while. He— Natsuki Subaru probably won’t be setting foot in here again, I’m afraid.”

Minerva: “And you are okay with that? Not that I’m worried you’d get lonely or anything, but don’t you usually say something at the end? You were always so insistent about getting your compensation or whatever.”

Echidna: “Compensation... Ah, that’s right. Would you guys laugh if I told you that was my parting gift to him in consideration of his foreseeable tribulations?”

While she put her hand to her chin and pondered, the other Witches looked at each other. Then, sharing a nod, they opened their mouths at once,

Witches: “—Definitely not!”

Echidna: “Goodness, more people have recognized goodness in me than I thought...”

Minerva: “After all, getting no compensation and just helping for helping’s sake is something that would never happen out of you.”

Saying this, Minerva folded her arms while the other Witches nodded in agreement.

Echidna closed her eyes in front of their unanimous opinion, and, clearing her throat,

Echidna: “I guess we still have a whole lot of things to talk about. But seriously now, is that really what you think of me?”

Witches: “———”

Echidna: “But, well...”

Before the silent Witches, Echidna drank up the remaining contents of her cup, and then, bewitchingly licking her tongue over her lips,

Echidna: “—You are not wrong in the slightest.”

Arc 4 Chapter 80 - Rough Tongue

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 13, Chapter 2 “Ignoring the Odds”, Part 1

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

—He woke to the sensation of something rough brushing against his cheek.

His returning consciousness was wracked by a pervading sense of exhaustion, and his body felt so heavy that it might’ve been lead rather than blood running through his veins.

Prying open his dry, sticking lips to inhale, sharp pain and the taste of blood seeped into his mouth, while, inside his completely parched oral cavity, his tongue scampered about, seeking moisture from the liquid called blood.

His limbs were sluggish, and his feverish head was barely functioning. He lacked even the strength to force apart his eyelids, only managing to open them by rolling his heavy eyeballs. And there,

Subaru: “...It’s you.”

The moment color entered his vision, Subaru’s eyes picked up a different hue of black than the darkness beneath his eyelids.

Exhaling breaths carrying the characteristic scent of living lifeforms, the creature had been consolingly licking Subaru while he slept.

It had a lustrous black body, its form slender and refined. Although sharp, there was a certain charm about its reptilian eyes, and its knife-like fangs could send one to eternal rest with only a single bite—reaching out a red tongue from between those fangs to lick Subaru on the cheeks, it was Subaru’s beloved dragon, Patrasche.

Seeing that Subaru had awakened and noticed her presence, Patrasche stopped her licking and sat down, waiting for his words. Apparently, the surprisingly dexterous dragon could bend her knees to sit down on the spot.

Seeing Patrasche before him, Subaru realized that he was sitting with his legs splayed on the ground and his back leaning against something hard. He tilted back his head to find a moss-covered stone wall behind him, and that he had woken near the entrance of the Tomb.

Subaru: “But, I was inside... Why am I outside...?”

The established precedent was that he’d wake up from the Dream Citadel to find himself inside the Tomb. If someone had gone in and pulled an unconscious Subaru out, then that’d be a different story, but the only two people in the Sanctuary who could enter the Tomb were Emilia and Garfiel.

The notion that either of them could have dragged Subaru outside wasn’t terribly convincing.

Subaru: “Then again, I doubt I crawled out of there myself, so...”

“Who”, he was about to mutter, when he was interrupted by the echo of another voice. The voice came from behind Patrasche, from an approaching figure in the distance, dragging his feet and out of breath.

???: “Oyyyyy! P—Patrasche-chan, wait... hold on...! Haaa, haaa... I—if you really run away, it’ll spell disaster for m—— Huh?”

The grey-haired young man—— Otto, stopped still, wearing an expression of sheer relief at the sight of Patrasche. After he caught his breath, Otto tilted his head as he noticed Subaru beside her.

Otto: “Is that you, Natsuki-san? What are you doing out here?”

Subaru: “Can’t you see? I’m moon-bathing. More like, what are you doing out here? Depending on your answer, I’ll see about turning you in to Garfiel.”

Otto: “I don’t know why you’d automatically assume I’m doing something devious, but me being out here at this hour, sweat dripping down my brows, isn’t entirely unrelated to you, Natsuki-san.”

Seeing it was Otto, Subaru jokingly glossed matters over as usual. Otto slumped his shoulders at Subaru’s reply and shook his head as if saying “Good grief”.

Subaru: “It’s not unrelated to me?”

Otto: “There was a big commotion at the stables, so I went there to see what’s going on, and I found Patrasche-chan kicking up a ruckus. I thought maybe she’s stressed out from being cooped up for so many days, so I unlatched the gates hoping to take her for a little stroll and... POW.”

Making a big clap with his hands, Otto squinted at the dignified Patrasche. But Patrasche simply ignored him, keeping her gaze on Subaru.

Otto: “Why do I feel like I’m being completely disregarded... Ugh, never mind. So anyway, she knocked me flying and dashed straight out of the stable. I was disoriented for a little while, but then I really panicked when I realized what serious trouble I’d be in as the one who let her escape... So that brings us here.”

Subaru: “And since she’s come to me, you can relax now, huh.”

Otto: “Yeah, no kidding. Natsuki-san, did you leave some kind of instruction for Patrasche-chan?”

Subaru: “Never had the time. I didn’t even come to see her that much except to give her food...”

Otto: “Well that explains why she’s so worried... You should’ve seen the way she rushed out of there.”

Subaru: “———”

Worry. Hearing this word in Otto’s muttering, Subaru’s rebuttal suddenly clogged in his throat.

No way, the thought surged into his mind as he looked down at his body in search of evidence. And there, he found it. On the right shoulder of his jacket were dented teeth-marks, mingled with traces of saliva. The middle of Subaru’s back was also plastered with dust as though he had been dragged over the ground.

Subaru: “Patrasche...”

Patrasche: “———”

Her round pupils focused on Subaru. Seeing the dragon silently waiting for her master’s words, Subaru inadvertently held his breath.



Subaru: “Did you... drag me out of the Tomb?”

Of course, there was no way for Patrasche to answer back with words. But, looking at Patrasche after seeing the dirt on his own body, Subaru noticed that her black skin was littered with lacerations.

Coated in resilient scales, it would be no easy task to damage the ground dragon’s skin even with the appropriate tools. But it seemed to Subaru that these wounds were inflicted from the inside.

Only then, did he remember.

—The Tomb would use its powers to expel those unqualified to take the Trials.

The wounds that confined Roswaal to his residence were inflicted similarly. When anyone without qualification trespasses inside, the Tomb would mercilessly bare its fangs— Which meant,

Subaru: “Did you seriously... get yourself hurt to pull me out...?”

Patrasche: “———”

Subaru: “Why would you... do something so stupid... for me it’s just waking up and walking out of there... That’s it. You didn’t have to get all flustered and hurt yourself pulling me out...”

The gashes carved into her skin were deep enough that the red flesh beneath her black scales was showing through, and just the sight of blood seeping from the gaps made Subaru want to wince in pain.

Patrasche’s persistence in pulling Subaru outside despite her wounds— was, quite frankly, pointless.

Unable to understand the meaning of Patrasche’s actions, Subaru dropped his gaze while the ground dragon brought her snout closer. Subaru, still sitting there with his legs powerlessly splayed out, felt its tough surface brushing over and over against the back of his neck.

The unspoken understanding Subaru thought existed between them, was in fact a one-way road, and their relationship was actually just him being cared for in various contexts.

Subaru: “Otto.”

Otto: “Huh? What is it? You two look like you are having a nice moment, so I was thinking I should just leave so I don’t get in the way...”

Subaru: “Can you... please ask Patrasche why she’s helping me?”

Otto possessed the Divine Protection of the Soul of Language, which allowed him to speak with animals, bugs, and various other life forms. Naturally, that meant he could communicate with Patrasche as well.

What was Patrasche thinking when she pulled Subaru outside in spite of her injuries? —What could be laying at the root of her actions unsettled him to no end.

But Otto frowned at Subaru’s request, looking reluctant.

Otto: “Honestly, I’d rather not, Natsuki-san.”

Subaru: “Don’t say that, just please.”

Otto: “From what I can guess from your mutterings to Patrasche-chan... Natsuki-san, you were just inside the Tomb taking the Trial, right? Judging from today morning, I’d already vaguely suspected that you are qualified for the Trials, but, from the looks of it... you failed?”

Subaru: “...Yeah, pretty much.”

Though the intensity of his interactions with the Witches had muddled his memory, in this loop, Subaru had yet to tell the others about taking the First Trial. After revealing it only to Garfiel, he re-entered the Tomb to the Second Trial and the Witches’ tea party.

The Trial wasn’t the only reason he was so distraught, but Subaru saw no reason to correct Otto’s misunderstanding and merely nodded his head.

Hearing this, Otto slumped his shoulders and let out an astonished sigh.

Otto: “I can imagine several reasons why you did that... But what you did was stupid, Natsuki-san. Your time in there was harsh, and on top of that, you worried your dragon, getting us where we are now. Patrasche-chan has a keen intuition, and she must’ve sensed that something’s happened to you. That’s why she knocked me out of the way and rushed over... And her wounds couldn’t have been unrelated, either.”

Subaru: “———”

Otto followed the same train of thought to reach the same conclusion. Subaru had figured as much. But the question was why did Patrasche go so far for him? That was what he wanted Otto to ask her.

Otto: “What? What’s with that look? You mean you are actually serious about what you said?”

Subaru: “How about we flip this. Do I really look like I’m in a state to be joking right now?”

Otto: “I’m sure you’ll find a way to tell terrible jokes even when you are ragged and torn, Natsuki-san. In this case, I would’ve been happier if you were joking—— You really don’t know?”

Before Subaru could refute that quiet question, he found himself overwhelmed by Otto’s gaze. It was nearly a look of disbelief, as if Otto was looking down at Subaru like he was a moron. So, was there something huge Subaru had overlooked, or what?

But finding no answers, Subaru only fidgeted, furrowing his brows, and looking confused. Sweat rose on his forehead from the anxiety, but still nothing came to mind. Seeing this, Otto sighed once again,

Otto: “My Divine Protection isn’t as all-powerful as you think, Natsuki-san. While it can communicate ideas, that doesn’t mean it can do translations. Even if what you say makes sense to me, I can’t act as an intermediary and convey it to someone else, there’s a tricky problem of nuance.”

Subaru: “———”

Otto: “That look’s totally saying, «do it anyway». Well, I can do it, but... I don’t really... see the... point...”

Drooping his head, muttering in dissatisfaction, Otto nonetheless gave in to Subaru’s request. He approached Patrasche, still rubbing against Subaru with her snout, and gently stroked her jet-black back,

Otto: “———!”

The sound that came out of Otto’s opened mouth was scraping and shrill. Bearing no resemblance to human speech, it was the product of the Divine Protection of the Soul of Language, which was converting his words into a cry that ground dragons could understand.

Patrasche lifted her head and answered in a similar screech. Hearing this, Otto opened his mouth again, and they went on exchanging these screeches, until,

Otto: “That’s about it, but... Hnnnnnnn, it’s kind of hard to find the proper words to communicate this. The way dragons express emotions is different from humans as well, so how do I explain this from only what I can understand...”

Subaru: “Stop playing around. Just tell me, please.”

Otto: “It’s not that I’m playing around... Ugh, this is really problematic! I mean, it’s really going to require an insane amount of consideration to get this right.”

Scratching his head, Otto looked up several times as he deliberated, only to lower his head again to continue thinking while Subaru started impatiently fidgeting. Then, Otto sighed, and,

Otto: “Alright, here it is. I’ve chosen the words that... probably... will be the closest I can manage.”

Subaru: “Right... So what did Patrasche say?”

Otto: “Mmmmm, it would be something like «Well don’t make me say that out loud».”

Subaru: “—Huh?”

Subaru’s eyes widened as Otto embarrassedly scratched his cheek.

Subaru waited a bit longer to see if Otto had anything else to say, but it didn’t seem like any more words were coming. Seeing the dumbfounded Subaru, “Well”, Otto went on,

Otto: “Patrasche-chan said, «Well don’t make me say it out loud». And in my opinion, that sounds about right.”

Subaru: “Don’t make me say... What...?”

Otto: “Whichever way you take it, that’s what it means. If I must supplement with my own opinion, it would be «Do you really need to be told that for you to understand it?». Something like that.”

Seeing Subaru’s confusion deepen, Otto held up a finger with “You listening?”,

Otto: “When you don’t know whether someone is in danger, but you couldn’t bear standing still and rush out, paying no heed to your own injuries as you lend them your hand, then you stay at their side until they wake up, and finally give them a relieved smile when they wake— I think whether it’s a human or a dragon, when they do something like that for another person, it’s pretty obvious what they are thinking.”

Subaru: “Ah—”

Otto: “So even if you are not Patrasche-chan, you should know what «Well don’t make me say that out loud» means. If you still can’t tell from her attitude, then you are just way too daft. You are really lucky, aren’t you?”

Hearing Otto’s exasperated question, Subaru realized just how stupid he was.

He looked at Patrasche, still sitting at his side, and found her staring at him with the same relieved gaze. As if noticing the shift in his mind, she wagged her long tail and stood up,

Patrasche: “———”

Once again, she brought her snout over, and Subaru’s hand naturally moved to pat it. Stroking his palm over her hard, craggy hide, Subaru’s voice was trembling,

Subaru: “So, um... You, like me, huh.”

Patrasche: “———”

Subaru: “You love me... that’s why you are here for me... huh.”

Something that had weighed on his chest suddenly dropped with a *thunk*.

Patrasche growled in reply, then violently rubbed her snout inside his palms as if to hide her embarrassment. Subaru furrowed his brows at the sensation scraping his skin, and, when he opened his mouth,

Subaru: “Oh... Ah...”

Otto: “Natsuki-san?”

A droplet of heat rolled down his cheek.

It was a teardrop. For before he knew it, the tears that had abruptly welled up in his eyes overflowed. Quickly wiping it with his hand, it was too late to hide it. Otto already saw it.

Otto: “Are you... crying because you realized your ground dragon is attached to you... Natsuki-san...”

Subaru: “Nonono... That’s not what this is... The timing’s just lined up too well... Ugh, just when I thought it didn’t feel real, the answer suddenly flew into my mind when I wasn’t prepared...”

The unfair timing of this revelation caused even more emotions to come flooding in even as Subaru desperately tried to restrain them.

Back at the Witches’ tea party, Subaru had realized that he didn’t want to die. And that just as much as he wanted to protect those he loved, he also wanted to be there alongside them in the end. As for whether he was worthy enough for them to care about him, that was more difficult to say, and so he swore that he would find out.

And now, Patrasche’s unconditional loyalty. Being hit with something like this before he had done anything, what was he supposed to do?

The answer to the question he had been agonizing over, Patrasche had just given it to him along with his awakening. At least to Patrasche, Subaru was precious enough that, when she sensed he was in a nightmare, she rushed there to pull him out even though it meant injuring herself to do it.

Subaru: “Didn’t think I’d be getting this lesson from you— Thank you, Patrasche.”

Answering the loyalty directed at him, Subaru filled his strokes with sentiment as he patted Patrasche. And, standing still, Patrasche resolutely stretched out her neck to savor his touch. All the while, she was swaying her tail in indication of her happiness.

Otto: “Now that you’ve reconfirmed your bond with Patrasche-chan, are you alright, Natsuki-san?”

Subaru: “Yeah, that helped a lot, thank you... Am I alright?”

Otto: “I mean physically and mentally. The Trial must’ve been really hard on you, right? You looked like you were almost crying from loneliness, and Emilia-sama was the same way.”

Just when Subaru was about to refute Otto's observation, he realized just how frail he must have been, and did not say anything. Instead, his thoughts turned to Emilia,

Subaru: "It wasn't easy, that's for sure. But I think it was easier on me than it was on Emilia. More importantly, since you were worried about me... does that mean you love me too?"

Otto: "Can you please refrain from turning it into something repulsive!? There are lines you shouldn't cross even if you are feeling lonely! Is Patrasche-chan not enough for you that now you have to ask that question to anyone you meet?"

Subaru: "Can't I? Honestly, right now I'm right on the fence about whether to give myself validation here, so I'd like to get one more encouraging message please."

Otto: "Right, right, good to see you are back to your usual self... My worries for you were purely out of consideration for our future cooperation, I hope you don't misunderstand."

Scowling at the warning signs of Subaru's returning eccentricity, Otto threw up his arms, saying this.

Future cooperation was a rather pretentious way to put it, but for Otto, who would like to clearly maintain his standing as a merchant, this was a necessary thing to say.

Otto: "My acquaintance with you, Natsuki-san, is purely to preserve cordial relations with Margrave Mathers. Should any problems arise on that front, or should it appear that I myself will be faced with peril, I'll be scurrying away as fast as my legs can take me. I'd like you to remember that."

Making that rather unfeeling statement, what Otto said wasn't as heartless as it sounded, because it was already the implicit understanding between them. The fact that Otto kept going out of his way to say it only showed that he was a kind person at heart, late as it is to mention this.

Subaru: "Right, yeah. You'd... Actually, no."

Just as Subaru was about to accept Otto's realist remark with a nod, he stopped.

Listening to him just now, a sense of awryness scraped across his chest. Then, arriving at the answer instantly, Subaru sighed.

Otto: "...What is it?"

Subaru: “I just remembered. Yeah, remembered... Remembered.”

Nodding several times in front of the confused-looking Otto, Subaru held his hand to his head and tilted back his neck.

Subaru and Otto had operated together many times in these loops inside the Sanctuary. Each time, Subaru had seen him. And because Subaru had seen him,

Subaru: “You’ll scurry away at the first sign of danger, huh?”

Otto: “Yeah, you bet. It’s obvious, isn’t it? There’s no reason for me to extend my concerns to you or anyone else. Where there’s life, there’s hope, as they say...”

Subaru: “You wouldn’t run away.”

Otto: “—Huh?”

As Otto tried to take a realist’s stance by assuming this frivolous tone, Subaru muttered. Seeing Otto’s eyes widen, Subaru looked at him straight on, and said,

Subaru: “—You wouldn’t leave me and run, Otto.”

Otto had snuck into a hidden building being guarded Garfiel who was prepared to inflict violence, all to rescue Subaru.

Otto had fought alongside the villagers, in an attempt to halt a transformed Garfiel, all to protect Subaru.

Even as he dressed himself in heartless words and pretended to be a bad person, Subaru knew that that was not the case. That’s because,

Subaru: “Otto— You are my friend.”

Arc 4 Chapter 81 - Glimmer of Hope

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 13, Chapter 2 “Ignoring the Odds”, Part 2

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

After receiving that pep talk from Otto and Patrasche, Subaru’s heart was temporarily brought back from the depths of the abyss.

Quite frankly, there was a lot about the events inside the Dream Citadel that he still hadn’t swallowed down, but nevertheless, he must chew them and turn them into strength.

Subaru: “Well... I won’t be getting any help from Echidna anymore...”

The Witch of Greed Echidna had put up a friendly facade as she observed Subaru’s struggles. But after their final exchange, he was now convinced that that wasn’t all of it, and that Witches are creatures who never stray from their principles.

This was made painfully clear by the other five Witches— Sekhmet, Daphne, Carmilla, Typhon, and Minerva. In Subaru’s eyes, they certainly weren’t evil beings. But by no means would he call them virtuous. This was true even for Minerva, whose very creed was to heal others. The way she rushed with self-abandon to heal him, despite losing her arm and legs, was more horrific than noble.

As for the final Witch, Satella— He would much rather not think about her for now.

His feelings for Satella, and those incomprehensible emotions surging inside him. He instinctively knew that seeking answers now, when he was so pressed for time, would be dangerous. And those final words they exchanged at their parting. The last he saw of Satella— just remembering her in that moment sent the insides of his chest into a frenzy, as if his heart would tear itself out.

And so, Subaru consciously avoided thinking about Satella, and instead directed his thoughts to other matters. That is, the last bit of advice Echidna had given him, and the question of whether he should accept what Satella said entirely.

Subaru: “Be kinder to myself... That’s easy to say, but...”

By meeting Satella, and through the experience of the First and Second Trials, Subaru was made aware of the fact that those he wished to save from death would also grieve over his— And that, in his heart of hearts, he did not want to die.

But then, what could he do? Nothing had changed the fact that he had no other weapon at his disposal. The multitudes of problems waiting to be solved hadn’t gone away. In fact, the number of people he could rely on to help him had only decreased.

Though his heart had slightly gotten back on his feet, everything else had only degraded rather than improved.

Subaru: “Rely on the people who care about me... How am I supposed to do that...”

Just be honest and ask them for help. That’s probably what she meant.

But the one forbidding him from telling others was none other than Satella— Or, judging from the flow of the conversation, the one forbidding any mention of Return by Death was probably the Witch of Envy personality. Perhaps, Satella had different ideas than her alternate persona. And, the meaning of that final whisper was—

Subaru: “—Ugh, I already said this isn’t the time to be fucking thinking about this.”

Noticing that his thoughts were once again drifting towards Satella, Subaru stepped on the brakes.

What he needed to do was find to concrete plans to solve his problems.

Subaru: “Garfiel is... afraid of the outside world... Huh.”

That was Echidna’s last piece of advice, and possibly the information needed to break through this situation.

Garfiel had practically confessed that he had taken the First Trial, and Echidna's words had confirmed it. The question was, what did he see in his past that made him afraid of the outside world?

The trauma of not being able to follow Frederica out of the Sanctuary to live in Roswaal's mansion couldn't be unrelated. But Subaru doubted Garfiel would divulge it freely if he asked him upfront.

Subaru: "Which means I'll have to get it out of someone who knows... Frederica or Ryuzu-san were both pretty tight-lipped about it..."

If Frederica's words were to be believed, then she was unable to follow Garfiel into the Tomb, and consequently, she would not be in a position to know the contents of the Trial. Ryuzu, on the other hand, or at least the Ryuzu clone who ran in to drag him out, had taken the Trial. There was a good chance that she might know the details of Garfiel's Trial.

Subaru: "As much as I'd hate to do it... The most reliable plan would be getting the command right from the Ryuzu Meyer crystal and ordering her to tell me."

Not even the leader of the clones and the representative of the Sanctuary, Ryuzu, could disobey an order from the person holding the command right. Even if it went against her wishes, he could force her to do it. And more than just information, it would also mean obtaining the support of twenty-odd accomplices. At least, that was how he tried to convince himself.

Subaru: "-----"

The image of the Sanctuary in flames, overrun by a horde of white rabbits, rose in his mind. As well as the wretched memory of ordering the Ryuzu clones to protect him as he ran.

I must get to Emilia's side. With that as his justification, Subaru mindlessly gave his order as he sprinted, wound-ridden, into the Tomb.

He had never regretted or reflected on his actions after the fact, but now that he looked back on it with a clear head, the callousness of his deed horrified him. Especially now that he realized that it was out of his own pathetic desire not to die. Was there a more arrogant, more shameless way he could have sent those girls to their deaths? Even though he insisted that he didn't want to, he couldn't trust himself anymore.

Subaru: “My head’s a mess... I’m going too far into the negatives, damn it. My brain’s gonna explode if I keep thinking like this. Let’s go one-by-one, and scratch off what I can.”

Questions and answers, untangle the problems. Start clearing them one at a time and then connect all the answered questions into a bigger solution. Approach the problems so that it leads to a positive outcome. First,

Subaru: “Since I’ve passed the First Trial, I should be the one to liberate the Sanctuary. There’s no need to put any more burdens on Emilia. Or rather, since any more pressure would break her state of mind, that has to be avoided at all costs.”

He could remember Emilia sweetly drawing closer in the snow-covered Sanctuary.

It was obviously the result of her mind breaking as she repeatedly challenged the Trial. Nothing good can come from making her face the Trials anymore.

Subaru: “Clearing the Trials will be my problem... Which brings us to the Second Trial. I managed to survive it, but... does that mean I passed?”

The presents that were not to be— Just as the name suggests, are worlds that would have been if a different choice had been made. The Second Trial was precisely to experience such parallel worlds.

To anyone other than Subaru, it might simply have been an exploration of alternate paths that the world could have taken. But, to Subaru alone, the Trial truly bared its fangs. Subaru was shown the continuations of the worlds in which he had failed.

Facing him was a myriad of regrets, consequences, and grief-stricken laments for his death. Taking them into his eyes and soaking them into his skin, Subaru’s heart was shattered to pieces.

Even now, recalling it sent chills coursing through his body and assaulted his limbs with inescapable numbness.

And, just when he was swallowed by the shrieking of his own heart, he was summoned to the Citadel of Dreams— So now the question is, did he pass the Trial or not?

It didn't look like he passed. But then, what would he have to do to clear the Second Trial? Unlike the First Trial, he couldn't figure it out at all.

Subaru: "Just thinking about it won't get me anywhere... I just have to do the things that I can do."

Shaking his head and clenching his indecisive heart, Subaru stood up. He pressed his hand against the mossy wall behind him and peered into the dark entrance of the Tomb.

He had been pondering here alone, with neither Patrasche nor Otto at his side. Embarrassed by the sheer stupidity of their last exchange, he had asked Otto to bring Patrasche back to the stables. In the end, although it reassured him to see Patrasche's concerned gaze as she left, Subaru needed some time alone to sort over the various thoughts on his mind.

Subaru: "The primary problems that need addressing are the Sanctuary and the mansion. In the Sanctuary are the Trials, Garfiel, and the Great Rabbit. In the mansion are Beatrice and Elsa... I'm fighting on too many fronts here."

With not a single solution in sight, he was just about falling into despair. But this was no time to be despairing. He must steadily eliminate his problems, one at a time— While no longer treating his life as if it were disposable.

Subaru: "First is to confirm the status of the Trials. If the Second Trial begins, then that's okay, but if it's completed and the Third Trial begins, that's even better."

At least, if he could remove the barrier sooner, that would help the situation greatly. He should start thinking about how to move Garfiel as well. In the worst case, when the Great Rabbit attacks, they'll be able to escape outside. Even Garfiel wouldn't be so stubborn when he is faced with the Great Rabbit.

Removing the barrier would move the problems of the Sanctuary closer to resolution. Thinking that far, a faint glimmer of hope opened before Subaru's eyes, bringing relief along. He had been racking his brain over the endless problems, but now he finally saw something that could be leading to the answer.

Subaru: "-----"

Standing at the entrance of the Tomb, Subaru held his breath as he gazed into the darkness of the stone corridor.

If he entered, the Trial would start, and he may be faced with another present that was not to be. Subaru could never get used to those scenes, no matter how many times he saw them.

But he knew that he was not allowed to ignore or forget them.

If he cannot escape, then he must face that challenge.

Subaru inhaled a deep breath, held it inside, and stepped forward. Venturing into the Tomb, he would challenge the Trials and release the Sanct—

Subaru: “———!?”

The moment he stepped inside, a sensation swept over him like a punch to the skull.

The pain was like needles stabbing directly into his brain as light scattered before his vision while his legs gave way. His upper body toppled, and, unable to stand, Subaru collapsed on the spot. Intense nausea surged up, wrenching out the contents of his stomach as he choked on its bile. He coughed, but no matter how much he did so his body would not be appeased.

Alarms, alarms, the alarm bells were ringing.

Caught in this cycle of discord and dissonance, Subaru panted as he tumbled towards the Tomb’s exterior. Instinctively, he knew. If he takes one step deeper inside, the torment racking his body would explode in ferocity.

Subaru: “Ugh... haa, pffffff, ah.”

Tumbling out of the Tomb and throwing his hands onto the grass, Subaru puked, and puked, and puked. The moment his body completely exited the Tomb, the agony tormenting his body fell away. The headache, the nausea, the numbness of his limbs all faded as Subaru looked up with his teary eyes,

Subaru: “Ah... Ugh... What was... that...?”

He looked to the entrance, but just as he reached out his hand to crawl towards it, primordial rejection rose inside him.

It wasn't in fear of the trauma from the Trial or anything of the sort— It was simply that he understood that the Tomb had rejected him.

Subaru: "What, is..."

It rejected him. Understanding this, Subaru immediately realized what had happened to him.

Patrasche was injured when she went inside to bring him out. Roswaal was severely wounded when he went in to challenge the Trials. The Tomb rejects those who lack the Qualifications to challenge the Trials. And it had just done so to Subaru.

Subaru: "That can't be... I mean, that would..."

Standing up, tottering, Subaru mustered the courage to face the Tomb once more.

But, in just one step, the moment his foot entered the headache and nausea returned as the overwhelming malaise crushed him so that he couldn't even stand.

Subaru: "Haa... haa, haah... ha."

Stumbling back drawing ragged breaths, Subaru pulled away from the entrance of the Tomb. This attempt only confirmed what he had already realized.

Subaru: "That... bitch..."

Floating into his mind was the white-haired Witch in her funerary dress. At their parting, surely, she was asking Subaru, "Will you take my hand, or will you take Satella's?".

And Subaru turned down her hand to choose Satella's.

If this was her revenge for his choice, then that's just far too—

Subaru: "And just when I thought...!"

In the very, very end, that apparent gesture of goodwill that had made him almost think fondly of her,

Echidna: "—You are not wrong in the slightest."

Hearing the mischievous voice of the Witch he should not be hearing, he turned his head to the sky,

Subaru: “Revoking my Qualifications... You said nothing about this, ECHIDNAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!”

——Natsuki Subaru had lost the Qualifications to challenge the Trials to liberate the Sanctuary.

Arc 4 Chapter 82 - Mutual Deception

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 13, Chapter 2 “Ignoring the Odds”, Part 3 (until halfway)

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Complete](#)

Subaru: “Right, so I’m not just imagining this...”

Touching his hand to the crystal before him and sensing no signs of anything happening, Subaru pressed his forehead against the cold crystal and sighed.

The girl sleeping inside the crystal, the original Ryuzu Meyer, made no reaction to Subaru’s lament. Although the lack of reply from that eternally sleeping girl was somewhat expected, the lack of reaction in the general sense wasn’t.

Subaru: “I’ve been disqualified... So even if I touch the crystal, the command right won’t transfer to me, huh...”

The right to command Ryuzu Meyer’s clones was a power only an Apostle of Greed could wield. Having rejected Echidna, Subaru had his qualification to challenge the Trials of her Tomb revoked. Apparently, he had been deemed unworthy of that role.

Standing inside the facility’s stagnant, sickening air, Subaru held his head as he saw his glimmer of hope fading.

The worst case, the absolute worst case before he confirmed this, was that it was the trauma from the Second Trial that made him hesitate to step inside the Tomb. Should this be the case, then it was only a problem with Subaru’s mental state. If he just forced himself to try again and again, he would eventually be able to bend his whimpering heart to his will.

But if it was something outside of his control, then there was nothing to be done.

Being unable to enter the Tomb also meant that he wouldn't be able to negotiate directly with Echidna to regain his qualification.

Even before that, considering their last parting, would any of the Witches even want to see Subaru again? —Probably not, would be his instinctive understanding.

Realizing this, Subaru understood that clearing the Trials himself was now out of the question, and the task of liberating the Sanctuary must be entrusted to someone else. Which means—

Subaru: "Emilia... will have to do it... then?"

Voicing the possibility that he was most afraid of, a heartfelt desire to curse Echidna's insidious designs swelled up inside him.

Echidna could read Subaru's memories. Only she could observe the repeating worlds the same way Subaru did. And so, Echidna must know about Emilia, and how her heart and mind had been broken from continually challenging the Trials alone. Echidna must also have known how desperately, and to what lengths Subaru would go to avoid that outcome.

Was the Witch of Greed forcing this hardship on Subaru and Emilia, knowing this?

Subaru: "What do I do, what do I do, what do I do, what do I do what do I do what do I do what do I do what do I do..."

His thoughts blazing and his mind growing white-hot, Subaru searched for a solution. But even as he taxed the burning synapses of his brain, not a single answer appeared to replace that extinguished glimmer of hope.

The situation was on a one-way road downwards, and the number of people he could rely on was diminishing.

A person who knew the situation he was in, who could pleasantly listen to his words with understanding.

Someone who could accept the things he must leave unsaid, and converse with him regardless.

Nothing would come of mulling over it alone. And he couldn't rely on Echidna anymore.

Which means, there now was only one person left whom he could share his problems with.

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Roswaal: “Iii certainly wasn’t expecting you to be visiting so late at niight.”

Subaru: “...Right, but why do I get the feeling you got everything ready and had been waiting for me? You haven’t snuffed out the light to sleep, and looks like you just lit the fire, too.”

Roswaal: “Aahaaaaa, so haaarsh. But, well, you are not wrooong in the least.”

Sitting up on the bed leaning against his pillow, Roswaal welcomed Subaru with a smile. While most of the lights in Roswaal’s residence were extinguished, the candle burning on his little bedside table had just been changed, its amber light swaying as it illuminated the room.

The entrancing, flickering candle-flame cast an eerie shadow over Roswaal’s pallid face. Taking this into his sight, Subaru swallowed a small breath as he prepared for the conversation to come.

If Subaru’s understanding was correct, then this conversation with Roswaal would—

Roswaal: “Aaand so? You’ve come to me in the middle of the night for a reason? Cooould it be, that you are here to win me over with impaaassioned confessions of your longings?”

Subaru: “...Confession... I wouldn’t call it that. Roswaal, is there a way to release the Sanctuary without passing the Trials?”

Roswaal: “———”

At that sentence alone, Roswaal’s smile curdled, taking on a lurid, ghastly chill.

In fact, the slit of the clown’s smiling lips stretched wide. Stroking his long blue hair, he nodded several times, gazing into Subaru with his single yellow pupil,

Roswaal: “Subaru-kun—— Which attempt are you currently on?”

That question took the reins of the conversation by implying that they both knew the whereabouts of what the other knew. With this, Roswaal would confirm the fact that Subaru could indeed Return by Death, and Subaru would know that Roswaal was in a position to know this.

And so, Subaru must present concessions while amending Roswaal's information.

With a short sigh, Subaru gave a purposefully emphasized shrug.

Subaru: "Sorry, but it's too stupidly many to count at this point. I can't remember how many times we've probed each other like this, either."

Roswaal: "I... see. Uuunderstooood. If you are putting it that way... I'll have to take your word for it, I suppose?"

Subaru: "So, how about it?"

Averting his gaze, Subaru tried to hurry the conversation along. However, he did not overlook the fact that his words had made Roswaal's cheeks stiffen, or that he had seized the initiative with his opening move.

—While Roswaal knew that Subaru was looping, unlike Subaru, he cannot retain memories from the previous loops.

This was something Subaru had learned in the loop where Roswaal revealed his knowledge of Return by Death. It was there, that Subaru learned of Roswaal's incomprehensible resolve where, despite knowing that his death will be the end, he still sought to use Subaru's Return by Death to attain his desired outcome.

Even now, Subaru couldn't help but find that way of thinking disgusting and repugnant, but—

Subaru: "I'm in the middle of some trial and error right now. So I'd appreciate your help."

Saying it with a kind of self-derision, Subaru was giving off the illusion that he was acting in accordance to Roswaal's intentions.

At this stage, Roswaal certainly knew more about the secrets of the Sanctuary than Subaru. It was unclear how much Roswaal's Gospel documented what would happen next, and it'd be no easy task finding out,

but, recalling Roswaal's mutters as he sighted the Great Rabbit, Subaru deduced that it wasn't detailed to that extent.

Which means, as long as he chooses his words carefully, there was a good chance Subaru could deceive Roswaal while extracting information from him.

Roswaal: "And part of said trial and error involves freeing the Sanctuary without challenging the Trials... is it? If so, that's rather faint-hearted. With the Authority in your possession, an infinite number of attempts should certainly make it possible for you to overcome any hardship. I don't know how many times you have tried... But to give up in search of another method... is surely a sign of insufficient resolve?"

Subaru: "I don't consider stubbornly betting everything on overcoming the Trials to be a clever way of doing things. I'd rather choose a sharper method if such a thing exists, that's all. It'd be silly to put style over substance here. The important thing is the fact that we escape from this place and that the credit goes to Emilia... Am I wrong, Roswaal?"

Keeping his face calm and collected, one-by-one, Subaru scrutinized his own words in real time as he spoke. The task of weaving and checking each word moments before they rolled off his tongue was straining his nerves to the limit, but he would stand no chance of deceiving Roswaal without doing so.

His argument was cold, hard logic. Most likely, this was the Subaru that Roswaal wanted to see. There was also no doubt that Roswaal wanted to make Emilia the ruler, and have Subaru help it come to fruition. Besides, Subaru imagined that the more ruthless the suggestion, the more they would fit Roswaal's desires. And, sure enough,

Roswaal: "I see... that is indeed an answer to my liking."

Roswaal smiled with satisfaction at Subaru's reply.

Seeing the color of depravity deepen on the clown's painted face, Subaru bit down on the insides of his cheeks while doing his best to keep his untroubled expression.

Roswaal's disturbing gaze suggested that he regarded Subaru to be of the same breed as himself. That is to say, Roswaal was considering Subaru to be the same as his own degenerate self— Visceral disgust swelled inside him as he thought this.

But the more Subaru tried to think of a difference between them, the more apparent his own crookedness became.

Roswaal: “Whiiile I am certainly delighted to see the change in your thinking, aaaaanswering your question would prove raaather difficult. There is no precedent. After all, the barrier has never been broken since it was placed there. I wouldn’t imagine there is a crack somewhere, since, considering who installed it, it’d be best to abandon all optimistic hopes for suuuch oversights.”

Subaru: “Echidna’s barrier, is it...”

Roswaal: “Eeexactly. The Sanctuary’s Tomb is her gravestone, and the barrier is something she erected in her lifetime to keep the half-bloods for her experiments from escaping... Aaalthough, I’m sure you’ve already discooovered that much.”

Subaru: “Well, obviously. Just saying, I already know about Ryuzu Meyer in the facility in the woods. That and the clones, and how Garfiel has the command right.”

Roswaal: “Ahaaaa, that doooes speed things up.”

While Roswaal gradually disclosed information, Subaru was also carefully revealing his cards. Hearing this, Roswaal closed his single eye, sighing as if in thought.

Roswaal: “The liberation of the Sanctuary is an indispensable achievement if Emilia-sama is to become King. If she siiidesteps it, the people of the Sanctuary and the villagers of Arlam will not see it as such.”

Subaru: “As long as we can get them outside for now, we can easily smooth that part over later. Besides, this isn’t the only chance for her to gather achievements. It’s actually pretty bad timing, in fact, so if we pick another time to...”

Roswaal: “Another time? Whyyy are you saying this again?”

Seeing Roswaal’s eye widen in bewilderment, Subaru realized that he had misspoken.

Having scoured himself away and confirmed his resolve over countless loops— That was the Subaru he was performing here. In that Subaru’s ruthless thinking, there was no reason he would pass up an opportunity to pick up an achievement right in front of him.

Without letting his regret show on his expression, before Roswaal's doubts could deepen, "Just think about it", Subaru continued,

Subaru: "As you already know, I'm willing to stop at nothing to make Emilia the King. So, don't take this the wrong way, but considering how I can rehearse the future and come back with all the information, liberating the Sanctuary is an insignificant event that doesn't really involve a lot of people. We could be putting our efforts into more important stuff like the White Whale and the Witch Cult instead— This place just isn't worth the effort."

Roswaal: "...Nooooono, liberating the Sanctuary is necessary. Let me make this clear, that point is beyond compromise. You see, I still have some inevitable doubts about your pooooooooowers."

Subaru: "Doubts...?"

Subaru tilted his head as the conversation took a strange turn. Seeing this, Roswaal nodded.

Roswaal: "Indeeeeeeed, liiii cannot confirm what your Authooooority can do with my own eeeeeeyes. It is also possible that I am not convinced by your excuuuses. Though naaaturally, provided there are results, I would have no choice but to acceept it."

Subaru: "..."

Roswaal: "I can say with all certainty that to make Emilia-sama ruler, my power... And the support of the House of Mathers is iindispensable. Liberating the Sanctuary is what will make me believe that your ability to assist Emilia-sama is genuine, and only then, can there be a positive relationship between us... I would like you to understaaaaaand this."

Roswaal narrowed his single eye, as Subaru fell speechless at the soundness of his argument.

Everything Roswaal said was true, and Subaru could think of no effective rebuttal.

Emilia needs someone to back her if she is to stand on that stage as a Royal Selection candidate, and no other person of influence besides Roswaal would be willing to do so. All Subaru could do was to accept this as the reality of things, there was no other way.

Following his orders so as not to displease his patron would be the correct course of action. Roswaal's views were sound, and the urgency of the situation was undeniable.

But even while being swayed by those waves of reason, Subaru still felt like there was something off about it. It just sounded as if Roswaal was far too fixated on the point of liberating the Sanctuary.

Subaru: "This is slightly off-topic, but..."

Roswaal: "Hm? Whaaaaat is it?"

Seeing Subaru raise a single finger to draw his attention, Roswaal tilted his head. Locking his gaze onto his single, mismatched eye, Subaru spoke.

Subaru: "Is there a reason you are so obsessed with liberating the Sanctuary no matter what?"

Roswaal: "-----"

Roswaal met that question with only silence.

Silence, as his smile deepened and his yellow eye pierced into Subaru's.

—Subaru could sense it on his very skin that the mood of the conversation was changing.

Arc 4 Chapter 83 - Mutual Confessions

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 13, Chapter 2 “Ignoring the Odds”, Part 3 (after halfway)

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#)

Sensing the prickling pressure on his skin, Subaru understood that his statements had just touched the core of Roswaal’s intentions.

Roswaal’s smile was now the same kind he had given before being devoured by the Great Rabbit in the snow, as he revealed a portion of his plans. It was an expression of neither resignation nor delight, one which only exacerbated the alarms in Subaru’s heart.

Roswaal: “Nooooow what gave you that idea?”

Delayed as it was, Roswaal’s obfuscation indicated that he had no intention of moving the conversation forward. At this, Subaru clicked his tongue with “Even if you say that”,

Subaru: “There was just something off about the way you turned down my suggestion just now. When you stick a condition like «the Sanctuary must be liberated» right at the very top, of course I’m gonna suspect something.”

Roswaal: “But I’ve already given you a very logical eeexplanation? Besides, for the sake of our future cooperation, some proof is necessary. That you can become Emilia-sama’s unfailing support, that you can always provide her with the optimal solutions at her side. That is what I want you to convince me of. The requirement for this is liberating the Sanctuary.”

Subaru: “But that doesn’t sound like it has to be liberation. Any other method of escaping should be fine? If you want to give me a chance to prove myself, you can set up plenty of those later...”

Roswaal: “Let me ask you something.”

In rebuttal to Subaru's insistence, Roswaal raised a single finger. Cut off mid-sentence, Subaru fell silent as Roswaal gave a calm, collected nod,

Roswaal: "You are the one who seems awfully preoccupied about the Trials? It's almost as if there is a reason you don't want the Sanctuary to be liberated?"

Subaru: "Of course I want it liberated! I want to get this barrier opened as soon as possible and move the problems we can't solve in here outside... But."

Roswaal: "But?"

Rambling before he knew it, Subaru realized he was playing right into Roswaal's hands. If he starts shouting and blurting out words without thinking, this game of deception will go to Roswaal.

As calmly as he could, Subaru picked his words.

Subaru: "I don't want to see Emilia's heart wounded from challenging the Trials."

Roswaal: "But isn't that what your Authority is for? Should Emilia-sama stumble in the Trials, you can always take her place. What is the issue here? The important thing is that the Sanctuary is liberated, you said so yourself."

Subaru: "Hn, guh..."

Caught off-guard by his own words, Subaru bit his lip, searching for something to say. But asserting nonsense on top of nonsense wouldn't lead to any sensible response.

Subaru: "Of course I know it doesn't matter whether it's me or Emilia who clears the Trials. Digging up the wounds of her past is too painful for Emilia. I know I should be doing it in her stead... It's just..."

Roswaal: "Please don't tell me you are looking for a way out because the Trials are too painful for you too?"

Roswaal's gaze harshened, as his words grew in sharpness. To the stumped Subaru, "No, no", he continued,

Roswaal: “To save yourself, to cower from the pain... If that is the reason you are searching for another way out, is that all that your feelings for Emilia-sama amooooooooount to?”

Subaru: “That’s not...!”

Roswaal: “It’s not? Truly? How can you possibly assert that? Who would believe that? If you care about Emilia-sama, shouldn’t you swallow down all the pain, suffering, and agony? If you love Emilia-sama, surely you must be caaaaaapable of this? If you hold Emilia-sama dearer than anything else, if you prioritize Emilia-sama above anything else, if you regard everything besides Emilia-sama as minuscule existences, all while placing Emilia-sama higher than anything else... Surely, there shouldn’t be any problems?”

Roswaal’s fluent and irrefutable speech was on the verge of engulfing Subaru.

Although Roswaal’s words were the very definition of extreme, anyone who understands Subaru’s Return by Death would likely reach the same conclusion.

If this were before Satella brought out his true feelings at the tea party, Subaru would probably have found himself agreeing with this logic.

—Yeah, that must’ve been it.

Subaru had wanted to declare to Roswaal that he would never be like him and sacrifice everything for the one thing most important to him.

But, if had he taken Echidna’s hand at the tea party, right now, Subaru would be living exactly the way Roswaal wanted him to, probably.

Abandoning thought, eliminating choice, seeking only the results, scorning absolutely everything else. No matter how much he gets hurt, so long as Emilia and everyone else are smiling in the desired future ahead, then it’s fine. That was what he had believed in.

But would Natsuki Subaru, after opting to withstand that suffering, be able to smile alongside them at the very end?

—Or would he only manage something forced and barren, out of a sense of obligation to smile?

Subaru: "...In a sense, what you are saying is right, Roswaal."

Roswaal: "In a sense?"

Narrowing his single eye, Roswaal tilted his head at Subaru's meaningful reply. Enduring the gaze of that yellow eye, Subaru spat out the words,

Subaru: "Like you said, if I throw everything else away and move forward protecting nothing but Emilia... I'm guaranteed to be able to save her. But that's not enough."

Roswaal: "Not enough..."

Subaru: "I will save Emilia. But I won't be satisfied with only Emilia. Rem, Beatrice, everyone in the Sanctuary, everyone in the mansion, and everyone who's helped me in the Capital... I want to save all of them, all together."

Roswaal: "———"

Subaru: "Your lifestyle of being satisfied with only one person just doesn't work for me. Honestly, I'm not sure if it's me or you who's greedy here."

Consistently longing for a single person and abandoning everything for that one person is, in a way, beautiful. One could even say that there is no nobler pursuit than to live by that kind of love.

Roswaal's methods might be the absolute in perfection for a single man's lifestyle. But to pull this off required horrifying resolve. Scouring his soul and casting away everything but the one most precious to him wasn't a lifestyle Subaru could live by.

Just as always, Subaru was far too petty. Like a selfish little child.

Roswaal: "...It seems it still wasn't enough to sharpen your resolve."

Subaru: "..."

Roswaal: "For a moment... Yes, for just a moment, I had hopes. That I might live to see my desired future. But... it seems that is noooooooooot to be."

Roswaal shook his head, voicing this lament.

Their exchange had revealed to Roswaal that Subaru still lacked the resolve he wanted from him.

For a Roswaal who desired a Subaru ready to conquer with unfeeling resolve, the current Subaru was only an unsatisfactory failure. At the same time, to Roswaal, this meant nothing less than seeing the endpoint of his own life.

Roswaal: “Just how many times... are you going to disappoint me?”

Subaru: “If that’s how you feel, then you could be a little more cooperative with me. If you were more open to lending me a hand, most of our problems could be solved by now.”

Subaru threw back this disdainful comment at the disappointed Roswaal.

The truth is, being hopelessly lacking in the combat department, Subaru desperately needed Roswaal’s strength. His incredible magic that rained fire on a forest of Witchbeasts and skills which accurately scorched the attacking Rabbits— countering the Great Rabbit’s threat would be impossible without Roswaal’s help.

Conversely, if Subaru could secure Roswaal’s assistance, that alone would solve the greater part of the Sanctuary’s problems.

However, Roswaal shook his head to Subaru’s cheap yet ardent request,

Roswaal: “Sorry, but I cannot. Working with you as you currently are would be far too disadvantageous for me. Hypothetically... Yes, let’s hypothetically say that I assist you, and you overcome this situation. Your resolve will remain uncertain, and you and Emilia-sama will undoubtedly encounter other obstacles in the future... Will you also rely on me then? Postponing the resolve that you truly should have sorted out here, and panicking, bewildered, once you fall into an unrecoverable situation?”

Subaru: “...”

Roswaal: “You see, Subaru-kun, I... cannot give my assistance unless it is to someone with whom I can entrust my goals. A relationship of dependence is not what I need for my purposes. And so, I want you to do what you can to convince me that you have the resolve to go forward.”

Subaru: "Your... goals..."

Roswaal: "Regrettably, it appears it will go unfulfilled this. I will have to place my hopes on the next opportunity. When you can truly and unquestionably accept your power."

Ending his words there, Roswaal's body laid down onto its side as if having lost its strength.

For Roswaal, his present self had already lost any reason to live. All that was left to do was to watch Subaru fail and rewind, bringing about the ending of this world.

If the conversation ended here, Subaru would not have achieved a single thing he came for. As he watched Roswaal withdrawing into himself, waving his hand urging him to leave the room, Subaru desperately forced his mind to think,

Subaru: "...So what would I have to demonstrate to convince you of my resolve?"

Roswaal: "Mhm... Honestly, I had hoped you'd have already figured it out from our interactions uuup to now. Rewinding so many times just to ask that really is a waste of effort."

Drawn by Subaru's words, Roswaal sat up once more and held a hand to his chin,

Roswaal: "In short, liberating the Sanctuary will achieve that. Your actions are indispensable to the Sanctuary's liberation, and you will need to possess the unwavering resolve to repeat as many times as necessary. The liberation of the Sanctuary itself will be proof of that resolve."

Subaru: "But why is that? Sure, that might be the closest to an answer if there is one, but... If it's just overcoming the Trials, what does that have to do with my resolve to cast everything else aside? I mean, there's also a chance Emilia could just pass the Trials on her own and..."

Roswaal: "There is none."

Finding Roswaal's statements a bit too extreme, Subaru immediately voiced his doubts. But, Roswaal's response was cold and cutting. Its sharpness daunted Subaru, while Roswaal wagged his finger,

Roswaal: "Your fleeting hopes will not come to fruition. Emilia-sama will neeeeeeeeever overcome the Trials. That *thing* is too weak at heart."

Subaru: "...That... thing?"

Roswaal: "Precisely. I'm sure part of it has to do with its upbringing and the habits it had grown accustomed to, but that thing is useless. It can't even stand by itself, just like a weak, brittle little child. Watching the manner in which she pushes herself out of guilt and remorse, it's so admirable I even feel some pity."

Hearing Roswaal speak of Emilia in a way he had never heard him before, Subaru was at a loss for words.

Courageous, tenacious, kind-hearted, eager Emilia, temporarily caught by an ill twist of fate and unable to resolve her Trials, would surely overcome it and liberate the Sanctuary with her own strength if only she was given time. Subaru never doubted this.

The only reason Subaru wanted to take the Trials in her stead was that they had no time, and that Subaru couldn't bear to see Emilia hurt.

It certainly wasn't because he had given up on her or thought her incapable of passing the Trials.

Subaru: "How could you say... that Emilia can't... Then why, then why did you bring her here!?"

Roswaal: "Because of you. Because you are here, even a weak, powerless half-elf could aspire to the throne. No, she will take the throne. That is certain. Because you will remove all other paths and ensure that her desires are realized. That is the power vested in you. If Emilia-sama has any value, it is that she holds the strongest card— You, in hand."

Subaru: "I'm... the strongest, card...?"

Roswaal's piling and dizzying statements, these fantastical words about him being strongest, lead Subaru into utter confusion.

These are adjectives foreign to his powerless self. And Roswaal's words are quite incredibly insulting toward Emilia, and unforgivable.

Subaru: "Just, fuck off! What would you... What would you know about how hard Emilia tried, what kind of thoughts went through her head, and how much she suffered challenging the Trials!? Being forced to

witness a past she didn't want to see, still, she... Do you know how desperately she tried!? And yet, you...!"

Roswaal: "If it all comes to nothing, then it is nothing but wasted effort. I'm sure you know far beeeeetter than I that it all came to noooooothing. If Emilia-sama's efforts bore fruit, you would have had no reason to coooooome here."

Subaru: "-----Hk!"

Subaru's shouted rebuttal did not make the slightest dent in Roswaal's composure. Instead, as if doused by cold water in the heat of passion, Subaru fell utterly speechless.

In fact, Roswaal's statements captured a portion of the truth. As far as Subaru had seen, Emilia had never progressed beyond the First Trial. Despite challenging with everything she had, each time she was thwarted by the barricade of her past, her heart was worn a little thinner. Unable to rely on her trusted Puck for support, as she was abraded down to her core, Emilia eventually came to mistake her dependence on Subaru for love, and broke.

Because he knew that future, Subaru could not refute Roswaal out of emotion here. But, there was no way he could just quietly watch as Roswaal insulted Emilia.

Roswaal, looking down on Emilia while expecting far too much of Subaru's Return by Death, was there some way to wipe that smug look off his face? ---The moment he thought of it, Subaru shouted it out,

Subaru: "Yeah, I get what you are saying now! But you know what!? Nothing will come of your plans!"

Roswaal: "Oh? And why is..."

Subaru: "You seem to be hoping I'd take Emilia's place and break through the Trials... but Echidna's already revoked my Qualifications! The outcomes you were hoping for won't be coming from me! Too bad, isn't it!?!?"

Clutching his chest, Subaru screamed at Roswaal's composed face. It was a painful affair for Subaru himself, but its meaning for Roswaal's plans must be simply devastating. Knowing that it'd be impossible even for Roswaal to keep calm once he learned this, Subaru was about to curl his face into a twisted smile, when,

Roswaal: “—Revoked... your Qualifications?”

Hearing a mutter, desolate and feeble, it was only moments later that Subaru realized it had come from Roswaal.

Before his eyes, Roswaal’s body sank into the bed, frozen rigid. Both his mismatched eyes were now wide open, staring at Subaru, while his lips faintly quivered. His usual self-assured attitude, that detached, all-knowing air, and that incorporeal queerness— had all peeled away.

Roswaal: “What... could it mean...”

Subaru: “What could it...? It means what it means.”

Called by that faltering voice, Subaru unwittingly answered in a shaken voice of his own.

Pressured by a voice that sounded nothing like the Roswaal he knew, Subaru swallowed his saliva to slightly moisten his parched throat,

Subaru: “Echidna... She disqualified me. Forget the command right over the replicants, even stepping into the Tomb sends my head reeling... I’m in the same boat as you now, can’t go in even if I try.”

Roswaal: “Why, did... No... How could this be... You, taking the Trials of the Tomb... Otherwise, the Sanctuary’s liberation... And her wish...”

Holding a hand to his lips, Roswaal let out this hollow mutter with a look of disbelief.

Seeing this unexpectedly intense reaction, Subaru was at a loss for words as he realized that his revelation went further than exacting revenge. Not just in this series of loops, but from the day they met, this was the first time Subaru had ever seen Roswaal panic. Just which part of his words could have shocked him to this degree?

However, Subaru only swallowed a breath, and,

Subaru: “Your Gospel... Does it say that I will overcome the Trials?”

Roswaal: “———”

Subaru: “I know that if things don’t follow the Gospel’s writ, you’ll be ready to give up on everything. But if you’ve decided that breaking through the Trials is my job... That won’t be happening now.”

Like how his victory over the First Trial carried over, and how the Witches seem to share his memories across Return by Death, the Citadel of the Witch of Greed lies beyond the rules of this world.

Even if he did Return by Death, the memories of their exchanges in the Citadel would not fade. That was why he felt saved in that place, and why he held more than a little fondness for Echidna— And that was why, he knew.

That even if he died and returned to the Tomb, his Qualifications would not be restored.

He would need Echidna’s permission to regain them, but to receive Echidna’s permission, he would need to enter the Tomb, yet to enter the Tomb, he would need the Qualifications.

—In short, Subaru had completely lost any means of challenging the Trials.

Roswaal: “Is there... a way you could regain the Qualifications...”

Subaru: “If there is one, you’d know better than me. If you are saying you don’t know, then how could I know.”

While answering Roswaal’s faint whisper, internally, Subaru noticed a possibility. Most likely, Echidna was even now watching Subaru’s struggles and hardships from inside her Tomb. As if sulking after Subaru rejected her hand, she must be waiting to see what he could do by taking Satella’s.

If that path winds up riddled with failures, and at last he relents and comes back crying to the Witch he had rejected, perhaps Echidna would offer him her hand once more.

—But, if he took Echidna’s hand then, it would mean throwing away every word he had said to Satella, as well as every feeling his heart harbored at this moment.

He would have delivered Emilia to the optimal future in the end. But even that would be better than scattering into a thousand pieces halfway.

Roswaal: “If you rewind the world, can you return to a time before your Qualifications were revoked...?”

Subaru: “You seem to be misunderstanding something, my power isn’t that infallible. It’s not like I can just return whenever I want with no price to be paid... Besides, the point I go back to will be too late. If I return, it’ll be after it’s been revoked. I still won’t be able to enter the Tomb.”

Roswaal: “I, see...”

Roswaal’s voice as he replied was weak, and his visage seemed to have aged all in a single moment. He had always carried a certain youthfulness about him such that it was almost impossible to discern his age. But now, with his shoulders drooping, even that was gone.

It was the anguished expression of a man who had clung to a delusion for a long, long time, only to be thwarted by something beyond his reach.

Beneath the clown’s makeup, for the first time, Subaru managed to feel that Roswaal was something of a fellow human. But this fact did not solve anything, no matter how much Roswaal might wish otherwise.

Subaru: “I’m just as lost as you are, Roswaal. But if we work together and talk this over, I’m sure we could come up with a solution.”

Roswaal: “———”

Subaru: “It might be pretty hard to get things the way your Gospel described, but the writ doesn’t have to be the end of everything. If we just follow its general plot... Well, you might not agree with that, but if we can come up with a compromise...”

Roswaal: “...Not enough.”

Subaru: “—Huh?”

Subaru tried to find some kind of compromise and make Roswaal concede. But, with eyes so hollow that he might as well not have heard a single word Subaru was saying, Roswaal murmured something. Inadvertently opening his mouth as he heard this, Subaru took a step forward.

What did Roswaal say just now? Did he mishear him?

And, inching closer, Roswaal’s whisper slid into his ears.

Roswaal: “—All the ways I tried to corner you, were they still not enough?”

Subaru: “What?”

Roswaal: “I don’t know the circumstances, but if Echidna went back on her decision, you must have had a befitting exchange. I was supposed to have steeled your resolve to challenge the Trials before such a rift could have opened between you... I didn’t succeed.”

Subaru: “———”

Roswaal: “If I had cornered you further... Made you realize that if you tried to reach for everything, you will lose what’s most important to you... Then this wouldn’t...”

Subaru: “Wait, Roswaal. Wait.”

What was he trying to say? Though Subaru had the feeling that it would be something decisive and he absolutely needed to hear it, for some reason he was hesitating. Because, if he kept listening, he would no longer be able to stand here.

He was sure of it.

Or rather, he had already suspected something along these lines for a very long time. Those quizzical suspicions hadn’t taken tangible form because Subaru’s thoughts had frozen on the idea that Roswaal had no reason to do this, and because of the thin, yet present, trust he held.

But the words Roswaal was about to say would sever that once and for all. Before this happens, he must say something. But no matter how hard he searched inside him, Subaru could not find the words, while time passed on,

Roswaal: “Summoning you and Emilia to the Sanctuary, knowing Garfiel’s disposition...”

Subaru: “———”

Roswaal: “Forcing Emilia-sama to challenge the Trials, knowing its horrors, so that her wounds would spur you to action...”

Subaru: “Wait, please wait. Wa——”

And—

Roswaal: “Perfecting you by having you lose those precious to you in a place beyond your reach... All of that, and it still was not enough.”

—With this, Roswaal had just confessed to pulling the trigger on the tragedies in the mansion.

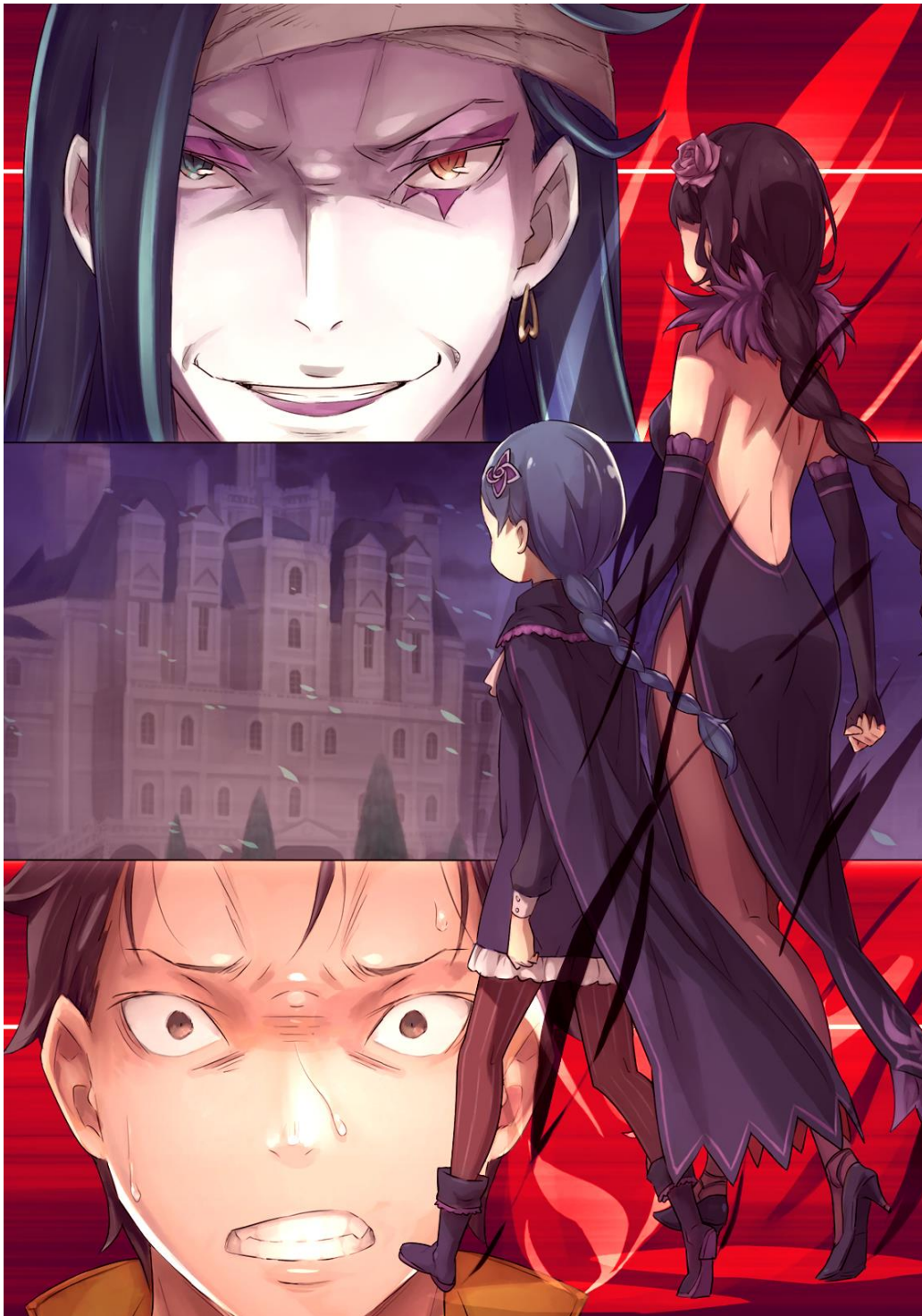


Illustration from Volume 13, coloring by Xarlasar ([source](#))

Arc 4 Chapter 84 - Denied x Denied x Denied

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 13, Chapter 2 “Ignoring the Odds”, Parts 4-5 (halfway)

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

—Crumbling, crumbling, the ground was crumbling beneath his feet.

Losing sight of the footing that by all means should be there, Subaru felt like he was falling from somewhere up high.

In reality, Subaru was only standing there frozen in the middle of the room, staring with wide-open eyes.

The fact that he nevertheless felt this was simply owing to the shock of Roswaal’s confession.

Subaru: “A place... beyond my reach...?”

Roswaal: “You already have the answer, don’t you? When two important things are simultaneously faced with peril, one would be forced to choose. Choose which one is more important, and which to cast aside. Only this way, by relinquishing everything except the one most precious to you, will you become the perfect being that you were chosen to be.”

Subaru: “What kind of bullshit is that!? The perfect being!? All I see is a stupid, wound-ridden moron stuck alone in the middle of a gale-swept wasteland!”

Roswaal: “And yet you may still stow the one most precious to you in a place abound in lusciousness, where its purity and beauty is untouched. Compared to your own injuries, this is more important, isn’t it?”

Roswaal, somewhat regaining his composure, asked this question, but Subaru did not reply.

It was not that he was persuaded, nor at a loss as to what to say.

But simply that his erupting emotions were so great in volume that they could no longer be formed into words.

—There was never a time he had felt so overwhelmed beyond speech.

Was the tragedy at the mansion just the result of this senseless obedience to this incomprehensible logic and this arbitrarily prophesying Gospel? Frederica, Petra, and Beatrice, did they die for such a selfish reason?

Perfecting Subaru's existence— was it for such a idiotic goal that those girls lost their lives, betrayed by the master they trusted?

Subaru: "Roswaal... are you really... actually... insane...?"

Roswaal: "...So it would seem. I have been for a long time. Ever since four-hundred years ago, when I was enchanted by those eyes, I have always been insane."

Subaru: "Four, hundre... d?"

Unable to swallow down the words that had just been thrown at him, Subaru only parroted it back at Roswaal with his face contorted by confusion.

Again, it was four-hundred years ago— but it was far too unnatural to hear it from Roswaal's lips. He couldn't possibly know what happened four-hundred years ago. Yet, the way he said it almost sounded as if he had existed all the way from four-hundred years ago until now—

Roswaal: "Natsuki Subaru-kun."

While Subaru's eyes wavered in bewilderment, a nearby voice called to him.

Looking towards it, it was Roswaal, who had stood up from his bed. Seeing his tall figure standing within reach of his exhaled breaths made Subaru step back with a gasp— But he was caught by his collar, unable to escape. Being pulled closer so that their foreheads were touching,

Roswaal: "You have judged me insane. Which I wholeheartedly agree. Without a doubt, I am insane. I am without sanity. Since a very long time ago, my heart was claimed from me."

Subaru: “Ah, haaa...”

Roswaal: “But why is it that you are not insane eeeeeeenough? You should be as insane—— No, even more insane than I. Your situation requires insanity to attempt. Because the place you are seeking is far higher than the place I am. For traversing a path of solitude beyond any comprehension or sympathy, you have no need for a human heart. Your heart must be strong, solid, as iron, yes?”

Subaru: “Ah, gh... st—stop it!”

One-by-one the words seeped into his mind as Roswaal’s voice drew him towards the depths of the abyss. Subaru shook his head, trying to dispel that sensation, shoving Roswaal’s chest away. Jabbing a finger at his lanky body as he stepped back, unable to hide the shaking of his voice, Subaru bluffed,

Subaru: “Whatever happens, no matter what, your plans had already gone down the drain the moment I lost my Qualifications! Those traps you laid for the mansion, all of it’s just pointless, meaningless sacrifice! If you understand that, then put a stop to this stupidity now!”

Roswaal: “I refuse—— Seeing your insufficient resolve, I am even more convinced of its necessity. There is no need for you to be human. I will corner you, wound you, force you to become so dependent on Emilia-sama that you shed and lose your humanity. At the same time, I will make sure that Emilia-sama is plunged into hopeless love and dependence for your very existence. With you two engulfed by that mutual reliance, I shall choose the course while you mindlessly drown. That is the one and only way that I shall realize my goal.”

Subaru: “Wh... at’s the point in any of that...!? No matter how much you whittle me down, that will not get my Qualifications back! You can break every bone in my body trying to do it, and you’ll still have nothing to show for it!”

Roswaal: “You should know best whether that is what you truly believe.”

Subaru’s screams were met by Roswaal’s frozen voice. The single, heavy thud in his chest was only because he grasped the meaning of Roswaal’s words. It’s quite simple, really.

Just as he figured—— If he truly, truly repented and asked for Echidna’s help, she would offer him her hand again. If he was ever genuinely, hopelessly lost and was content with merely moving forward, this option would still be available to him. And for that,

Roswaal: “If it means having you return to her, Echidna will gladly reinstate your Qualifications. Considering her nature, that is the expected outcome. I still know at least that much.”

Subaru: “...”

Roswaal: “Hold your conceit, Natsuki Subaru. You are not the only one who understands Echidna.”

Spoken in a tone completely unlike Roswaal, it was filled to the brim with hatred and malice.

Struck by the intensity of its loathing, Subaru’s body froze. And it was only when he digested the meaning of those words that Subaru realized what Roswaal’s goal may be.

Subaru: “The reason you are so obsessed with liberating the Sanctuary is... because that’s Echidna’s wish?”

Roswaal: “...”

Subaru: “She designed it so that the Tomb’s Trials would lead to the liberation of the Sanctuary... and completing this would serve as some kind of offering to her memory, is that what you feel?”

Roswaal: “...In life, Echidna had always wondered how this place would meet its end after her death. To that end, she left the Tomb’s mechanisms behind, and in there, she housed her soul. But for all of four-hundred years, the ending she desired has not visited this place.”

In the four-hundred years since the Sanctuary’s barrier was erected, not once had it been broken. Echidna’s wish of witnessing its end never came to pass. Could Roswaal’s desire be showing Echidna that end so that it would give her soul repose?

The idea itself wasn’t beyond Subaru’s understanding. While he never believed in ghosts back in his old world, in this one, Subaru had interacted with Echidna and the other Witches. Should it be that the Witches still had some attachment to this world, then wanting to grant their wish should evoke a feeling close to gratitude.

But to live entirely for that purpose while disregarding the lives of everyone else would be preposterous.

Subaru: “That’s not the same thing at all. Roswaal, we can find other ways to give Echidna’s soul repose. I promise, I will make sure of it— So call off the attack on the mansion.”

Roswaal: “I refuse. I will fulfill my desires and Echidna’s wish. I will do what is necessary. I will ruin all those I need to, I will wound you, I will become the villain, and I will bloody my hands if need be.”

Subaru: “Stop dragging other people into your own self-satisfaction! If there’s something you want to tell her, pull her out and tell her yourself! Instead of making sacrifices of some woman trying to create a future, some child who still has her future, and some girl who’s shutting herself in because she’s stopped believing in the future!”

There was no need for Frederica, Petra, and Beatrice to be sacrificed for this plan. And there was no way he could accept Roswaal’s self-indulgent reasoning, especially when it completely disregarded the lives of those girls and was designed only to wound Subaru.

Roswaal: “I refuse. The only offer I will hear is «I will do as Roswaal intended». All else I will reject. Their sacrifice is necessary.”

Subaru: “Fuck off. I’ll have no problem exposing everything that you are planning and all the consequences that’ll entail.”

Roswaal: “Or rather, you ought to think before you act. What would be the point of doing such a thing? Making my misdeeds public will not change a single thing about the situation the Sanctuary is wrapped up in. Emilia-sama will lose her backer for the Royal Selection, and the relationship between the residents and the refugees will only deteriorate. How do you think Emilia-sama will do in the Trials with a malice-laden bomb at her back? How many times have you already seen Emilia-sama crumble?”

Subaru: “Wh—when Garfiel learns that Frederica... that his sister is to be sacrificed in your plan, there’s no way he’ll just...”

Roswaal: “If that’s where you are placing your hopes, then you are truly blind. Garfiel will never rush out of the Sanctuary to Frederica’s aid. Just the phantom threat of what might happen to the Sanctuary while he is away will paralyze him with fear. Such is the pathetic, foolish existence that is Garfiel. Narrow-sighted, stubborn, relying on nothing but brute strength. Even with that half-witted head, he could see what could befall the Sanctuary without him. And so, you can never use him to your advantage— Because that child is far too desperately concerned with protecting the weak and brittle in this world.”

A desperate child, a description that jabbed at Subaru's chest.

It was the same evaluation the Witches had given to the self-sacrificing Subaru at the tea party. It would seem that Roswaal felt the same about Garfiel. Unaware of this, or perhaps knowing full-well, Garfiel nevertheless persevered for his goals wholeheartedly.

Roswaal: "Garfiel will not side with you. And I have no intention of halting my plans. All you need to do is let your heart be withered, polished, and perfected. Nothing else is necessary. Accept this, Natsuki Subaru— Accept that the deaths of those other than Emilia-sama mean nothing."

Subaru: "Shut up! !! I'll never become like that! I'll never... I'll never think like you, I'll never be like you! That's just not how humans think!"

Roswaal: "..."

Subaru: "I'm human. No matter what kind of random, incomprehensible power I'm given, no matter how much pain and suffering I endure, it'll never change that— I'm human. I'll always be human."

Declaring this to the silent Roswaal, Subaru backed off from his towering body. A flicker of complicated emotion briefly flashed across Roswaal's solemn expression, but he immediately shrugged.

Roswaal: "Weeell, no matter. So long as you have infinite chances, it is all the same to me. This time, I will give up on trying to convince you fooor now. I'll be leaving it to the next me."

Subaru: "It didn't work this time... It will be the same next time and the one after that, I'll never accept your proposals. I will never become like you."

Roswaal: "Leave the room now. This life no longer has any meaning to me."

Returning to his bed and withdrawing into his sheets, Roswaal left Subaru with these words and drew his attention away. He closed his eyes as if to sleep, literally shutting off any further conversation.

Seeing this, Subaru opened his mouth, but no words came.

Subaru: "-----"

Instead, without breaking the silence, he merely left the room, feeling defeated.

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Coming out of Roswaal's residence, Subaru wandered beneath the moonlight.

Subaru: "—What do I do?"

Muttering a seemingly impenetrable question, voicing the words that had been repeating over and over in his mind, he was answered by only an echoless silence. His question reached no one, merely disappearing into the void leaving a lingering emptiness in his throat.

In every sense of the word, he was stuck. He would have neither Roswaal nor Echidna's help now.

Collaborating with Echidna was now physically impossible and collaborating with Roswaal was now sentimentally impossible.

Subaru had considered this possibility. That perhaps Roswaal was Elsa's employer and the attack on the mansion was in order to spur Emilia— or rather, Subaru, towards the Trials.

It was almost as if Elsa knew exactly when Subaru would arrive at the mansion. And then there was the death of the possible informer, Frederica, combined with Elsa's knowledge of the hidden passage and the Forbidden Library. All things considered, the only remaining suspects were Ram and Roswaal.

However, Ram's utter devotion to Roswaal would give her no reason to do anything against Roswaal's interests, so that left only Roswaal— Yet, Subaru had always kept this possibility out of his mind, not because he didn't want it to be true, but because he thought it couldn't be.

Subaru: "If Roswaal is Elsa's employer, then..."

When Emilia's insignia was stolen the very day Subaru was summoned to this world, was that also on Roswaal's instructions?

If the Gospel's texts had foretold of Subaru's existence, of the existence of the Authority of Return by Death, and of the fact that it would prove indispensable to Emilia's victory, then the upheavals of that day would all have been necessary to procure Subaru as an ally.

His frantic efforts that day, the three deaths he endured to save Emilia, and Emilia's smile when he asked her for her name, was all that simply playing into Roswaal's hands?

Subaru: "If everything was following this prophecy... Then Rem's existence being stolen, the Sanctuary being entrapped... All of it was according to someone's plan...?"

In that case, all of Subaru's desperate struggles would have been nothing more than dancing to the strings that someone else was pulling. Was abandoning everything besides Emilia really the only way to proceed? Now that all roads were closed, was there truly no other choice?

Subaru: "What am I, stupid...? No, I am being stupid. This is exactly the kind of brainless thinking that made Roswaal who he is... If I let the same thing happen to me, I..."

The Gospel is not absolute. No one understood this more than Subaru, who had personally overwritten the prophecies in Petelgeuse's Gospel. The future-instructing Gospel is not all-powerful. In fact, every time something deviated from the writ, Roswaal gave up on the world and placed his hopes on the next—

Subaru: "—Huh?"

He felt like he hit on something strange just now. While speculating on Roswaal's Gospel and carefully going over the events in sequence, Subaru sensed that something was unmistakably amiss. But he just couldn't quite put his finger on it.

Subaru: "What is it... What... Something's off. But, what is it...!?"

As if being given an impossible riddle, Subaru searched through the mist for some sliver of light.

Roswaal's Gospel. Acting in accordance to the writ. Beatrice's Gospel. The Witch Cult's Gospel. No new prophecies following the death of its owner. Blank pages. Outcomes following the prophecy. Outcomes that don't follow the prophecy— This ongoing present that is currently deviating from the writ.

Subaru: "Still nothing— It's one step away, but I just can't reach it..."

Though he felt he was holding all the pieces of the puzzle, they would always scatter before he could form them into any semblance of an image. But it was a tug that he simply couldn't ignore.

Every time he was stuck like this, it was by piecing together smaller clues into an answer that he found the way out. This time is no different. If he could just assemble the fragments one by one—

???: “—Subaru?”

Subaru: “Mm?”

The call of his name pulled Subaru’s consciousness out of the sea of thoughts. Breaking out of the surface of the water, he found himself standing in the darkness under the pouring moonlight and saw Emilia gazing at him with her shimmering silver hair swaying.

Unable to hide his surprise at this unexpected encounter and the pain that stabbed at his chest, Subaru raised his hand, and,

Subaru: “Oh, Emilia... tan. What are you doing out here? It’s pretty late, you know?”

Emilia: “But that’s the same for you too, Subaru. If you stay up too late, you won’t grow any taller.”

Subaru: “I... think I’m about finished with puberty, so I’m not super worried about that...”

Emilia came in with a topic that was slightly beside the point as usual. Regaining some of his calmness thanks to her reply, Subaru naturally slid himself to Emilia’s side.

They were in the middle of the Sanctuary, in something of an open plaza. Leaning herself against the mossy stone of a dried-out fountain, Emilia’s silver hair drifted in the night wind as she looked to Subaru beside her.

Seeing an allure in her gloomy amethyst eyes gives a sweet, yet achy impulse to his downcast heart.

Emilia: “I couldn’t fall asleep, so I kind of came out for a walk... What about you, Subaru?”

Subaru: “...Nah, it’s the same for me. I’m the kinda guy who can’t sleep if you swap out my pillow, and Otto snores surprisingly loud as well.”

Emilia: “I’m reeeaaally surprised you are dainty about those kinds of things, Subaru.”

Emilia gave a quiet laugh, putting her hand to her lips. Watching her from the side, Subaru reflected that this was the first time he had reunited with Emilia since Returning by Death tonight.

In places unconnected to Subaru, people's actions generally follow the same path across the loops. Which means, on the night of challenging the First Trial, Emilia would've always come out here for a walk, unable to sleep.

Being invited to the tea party, being threatened by Garfiel's violence, discovering Ryuzu's true identity, and learning of Roswaal's dark machinations— While Subaru was busy with all of that, Emilia had changed her plans as well.

Emilia: "...You seem down, Subaru."

Subaru: "Mm, I guess. I'm not, though."

Emilia: "Hmm, liar. If you are the usual Subaru, you'd be more... kooky?"

Subaru: "It's been a while since I heard anyone say «kooky»..."

It's been a while since they've had this kind of exchange, Subaru thought as his cheek softened with relief. "See?", Emilia pointed at Subaru's cheeks, smiling.

Emilia: "There, you smiled. You always try to smile when you are in front of me, Subaru, but you couldn't do it just now."

Subaru: "——"

Emilia: "Did something painful... happen? If you are worried about something... If you want to tell me, I'll listen?"

Having the softening of his previously tense cheeks pointed out and having those words of concern flung at him, Subaru desperately tried to contain the heat building beneath his eyelids.

Her gentle, compassionate words permeated throughout his body. Surrounded on all sides, helpless and stuck, when even the last ray of hope is cut, he almost wanted to cling onto that beloved hand, so tenderly offered.

This wavering conviction, unable to follow through with even the resolve he had only just made, was both pathetic and frustrating.

Subaru: "It's... my own problem. I can't put that burden on you."

Emilia: "..."

Subaru: "Compared to me, you have a lot more on your hands, right? The way you were after the Trial... Are you really alright now?"

Emilia: "Mhm, I got you worried. That was unsightly of me, wasn't it? Sorry... I think I ran into a problem I just wasn't mentally ready for at all."

Subaru looked away, trying to change the topic, while Emilia managed a powerless smile in reply.

She leaned back into the fountain behind her, looking up at the night sky as if to distract herself.

Emilia: "Really... I wasn't prepared at all. I've gotten this far by running away from so many things that I needed to face, but..."

Subaru: "I don't see how that's a bad thing... What's so wrong with running away from things that you don't like? Does facing unpleasant things all the time mean that you'll beat them eventually? And who says you have to beat them? If you run away and find a different path, and then decide to take that path instead... is that really something people have to fault you for?"

Emilia: "Subaru...?"

Watching all those words spill from Subaru's tongue as he rambled, Emilia furrowed her brows. But without noticing her confusion, Subaru only kept going,

Subaru: "Echidna, who put up the Trials, Roswaal, who knowingly lured us here, and Garfiel, who keeps getting in the way, everyone's just fucking doing it for themselves. You are free to do whatever the hell you want but why drag us into it? And then you bitch at us for not living up to your expectations... the hell do you want from us!?"

Emilia: "-----"

Subaru: “My head’s about to explode and I’m at my wit’s end. And yet and yet and yet and yet more problems just keep piling up... and to top it all off, it’s supposed to be all my fault? Don’t make me laugh. Fuck off. Just f—”

Just as he was growing dizzy from the surging emotions and inexplicable rage—

—Soft palms looped around the back of his head, as he felt his body being pulled downwards. Feeling his head plunging into the softness before him, Subaru inadvertently stopped breathing.

A hot, yet tender touch enveloped Subaru’s face.

Through its warmth, he heard a heartbeat, while his blanked-out consciousness began realizing what was happening— realizing that he was being cradled against Emilia’s breasts.

Subaru: “Ah, aah—?”

Emilia: “Take it slow. Quietly now. Take it slowly, and listen to the sound of my heart.”

Subaru: “—Mm.”

Emilia: “Leave yourself to my steady heartbeat, and quietly breathe in, and out... in... and out... and repeat. Once you are calm, give me a pat on the back. Until then, we can just stay like this.”

His spine tingling with pleasure at the sound of the whisper in his ear, Subaru’s breathing accelerated. The shock of his unhinged emotions was blown away, replaced by the torment of all the blood in his body boiling.

How did it become like this? He was listening to the quiet beating of Emilia’s heart, yet his own was about to jump out of his chest.

But even his panicked heartbeat was naturally unravelling alongside Emilia’s breathing as her palms softly caressed the back of his head. Obeying her whispers, he took a deep breath, exhaled, and repeated until his lungs and his heart returned to normal.

Quietly, he tapped Emilia’s back. Her hands on his head moved away at this signal, while Subaru stood up, withstanding his reluctance to part,

Emilia: “Calmed down now?”

Subaru: “...Somewhat.”

Facing her gleaming amethyst eyes, Subaru spilled a small sigh. Hearing his reply, with “I’m glad”, a relieved smile rose on Emilia’s face. Trying his best not to blush from embarrassment, Subaru gave a little shake of his head,

Subaru: “Sorry for flipping out there... I really didn’t want to trouble you like this.”

Emilia: “I don’t feel troubled at all.”

Subaru: “But, you must be going through a lot more than I am... There’s no question about that... If I could, I should be saving you from all this... That’s what I thought.”

Emilia: “Subaru...”

He had always shown off his cool side in front of Emilia.

But the truth is, he was just an embarrassing, weak, conceited, useless, boastful try-hard who wanted to be at her side.

Subaru: “Nothing ever goes right... In fact I... spoke with Roswaal just now. About whether there’s a way to free the Sanctuary without the Trials.”

Emilia: “Huh?”

Subaru: “Truth is, I thought it’d be best if I took the Trials in your place... But now, I don’t think I can anymore. So I thought I’d at least find the shortcut that would be less painful, but even that’s not working out. Just... What do I do... I’m sorry I’m so useless...”

Emilia: “Subaru—”

Subaru hung his head. Despite receiving so many chances to repeat through Return by Death, he still failed to find a single solution. Just how pathetic is that?

If he had done just a little better, he could've prevented those tragic worlds he saw in the Second Trial from ever coming to be. And here too, there must be something he could do about this miserable situation—

Subaru: "But, I will find a way. I will make sure you won't have to get hurt or suffer anymore. So please, trust me..."

Emilia: "...Subaru."

Subaru: "Yeah?"

Emilia looked up at Subaru with her eyes drenched in tears. Gazing back at those teary eyes, within his wavering heart, Subaru steeled his resolve to ensure that its most integral part would never falter. He will defend Emilia, overcome the Sanctuary, save the mansion, and recover everything.

Though there is not the faintest visible sliver of hope in the road ahead, surely, he—

Emilia: "I'm happy you feel this way. I truly am— But, I cannot accept this kindness."

Yet, the resolve he had just supposedly steeled was, by the lips of that girl with unyielding conviction in her eyes, flat-out rejected.

Arc 4 Chapter 85 - With Words, With Feelings, With Fists

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 13, Chapter 2 “Ignoring the Odds”, Parts 5 (halfway)-6

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

Subaru: “—Huh?”

For a moment, unable to understand what he had just been told, Subaru only let out an astonished groan. His eyes widened and his mouth gaped open, while Emilia watched him as she formed her thoughts into words.

Emilia: “I’m happy that you feel this way about me, say these things to me, and do all these things for me. It makes me feel so safe, and I rely on you so, so much... But I can’t let you search for escape routes for me.”

Subaru: “N—no, it’s... it’s not such a one-sided issue!”

Emilia: “I’m the one who decided to take this challenge. There is somewhere I need to go, a door I need to pass through to get there, and right now, I need to do my best to pass through it. I don’t want to make any excuses.”

Subaru tightened his lips as he was struck by Emilia’s determined eyes. Her resolute visage was overflowing with strong-willed radiance. It was not the face of a weak little girl who would stop still in her tracks without Subaru there to pull her along.

“But, why?”, with his heart buried in questions, Subaru shook his head.

Subaru: “Emilia, I think your resolve is amazing. But the Trial is not suited for you. To go in there with no plan when the chances of winning are this... slim, I don’t think it’s noble or anything.”

Emilia: “...The chances do feel slim, I guess.”

Subaru: “...”

Emilia wryly smiled at Subaru’s matter-of-fact statement. Her eyebrows droop slightly because she accepted Subaru’s opinion with absolute sincerity. And Subaru himself felt like a horribly deficient human being for not immediately finding the right words to comfort her.

Subaru: “Can we at least wait until I find some clues? If I can just have some time, I... can make the whole thing easier for you. Then you won’t have to worry about...”

Emilia: “No, you can’t, Subaru. Somehow, I just know— That there are no shortcuts or sideroads to get through the Tomb’s Trials.”

Subaru: “———”

Emilia: “It’s strange. But I just know it. Even with time, unless I steadily prepare myself for the challenge, the result will always be the same. I know that.”

Subaru: “Ah...”

He had no words to refute her.

Though he didn’t know the exact details behind the Trials, he did agree with Emilia about these feelings.

Repeatedly challenging the Trial will not soften or intensify its contents nor its nature. The same conditions and the same contents will be there to welcome its challenger. Keeping its own properties constant, only changes in the challenger’s heart would result in different outcomes— This aligned perfectly with Echidna’s tastes.

Seeing right through his attempts to console her, Emilia’s understanding of the Trials was more than Subaru had imagined. And just as Subaru frantically tried to string word together,

Emilia: “Say, Subaru— Why do you want to help me?”

Subaru: “———”

It was a question that carried tremendous significance on the previous time it had been asked.

How desperately had Subaru struggled to answer her? How much hardship had he overcome just to tell her?

And that was why, being asked the same question now, Subaru could answer without the slightest hesitation.

Subaru: "I want to help you... because I love you— Because I love everything about you."

Emilia: "—Mhm. Yes, I know. Subaru, you love me."

Subaru: "———"

Emilia: "And it makes me reeaally happy that you do. It makes me feel reeaally safe. And makes me want to reeaally depend on you. And just having you watch me like this, I feel like I can reeaally try my hardest."

Holding her hands to her chest, her cheeks slightly blushing, Emilia closed her eyes. As if instilled with all her emotions at once, "And so", she continued,

Emilia: "Don't get stuck thinking that you have to do something. I can do my best just by having you watch me. If you want to do something, if you want to indulge my selfishness, then I want you to stay by my side. And be there behind me to support me."

Subaru: "Emilia..."

Emilia: "With your hand on my back when I'm faltering, I know I can stand back up again. And when I'm wavering, I want you at my side, Subaru."

Subaru: "———"

Emilia: "Thank you... for walking ahead of me, moving away the stones, smoothing out the path, cutting away the branches, and then guiding me by the hand. But, I think, if you always do that for me, I'll just be a burden to you. While I'll be all fudged up inside."

Subaru: "Who says, «fudged»... anym..."

He tried to say his usual line, but the words wouldn't come.

Subaru could no longer restrain the emotions swelling inside his chest. Just what is that indescribable, incomprehensible sensation? So as not to lose himself in that undeniable emotion, Subaru gritted his teeth as he continued facing Emilia.

Emilia: “I’ve only ever taken, and taken, and taken from you... So, this time, I want to do something different. It bothers me that every time I fail, I’m making you and everyone else worry... To make sure that doesn’t happen again, I’ll try my best to overcome it as soon as possible.”

In front of Subaru, who had fallen speechless, a subtle, courageous smile rose on Emilia’s face.

Emilia: “So please stay by my side and watch over me as I try my best— That’s all I ask of you, Subaru.”

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Subaru: “———Hk!!”

Slicing through the wind, straining his legs as he ran, his heart would not stop pounding.

Every perilous footfall sprinting down that slope sent branches cutting painfully across his cheeks, and, tripping countless times, he nevertheless continued frantically running.

Subaru: “———!!”

Expelling a soundless shriek, stretching his throat to the point of tearing, he gazed up into the night through the gaps between the obscuring foliage, into the cloudless sky, into the pale, radiant moon amid the shimmering stars, and screamed.

——As if to spew out all the foolish foolishness inside him, and to empty himself of everything.

——Emilia’s last, resolute smile remained seared into the back of his eyes. That smile, her proclaimed resolve, and his own mistaken conceit. He finally understood that sweltering impulse scorching the insides of his chest.

And because he understood it, he could not bear to stay another second. Instead, after parting from Emilia, Subaru rushed into the forest, running aimlessly like an animal.

Not permitting him to stand still, not allowing him to escape into sleep, that emotion which would burst into flames just at the thought of Emilia— Shame. Shame dominated Subaru's entirety, forbidding him to stop.

Subaru: "I... I...!"

Overwhelming idiot. Truly, truly, a hopeless, irredeemable idiot.

When Roswaal disparaged Emilia and called her a "thing", Subaru had flown into a rage. He bared his teeth, screaming, proclaiming that he would not allow Roswaal to insult her. But then, when he met Emilia right afterwards, when he told her everything that he wanted to do for her, and was rejected, that was when he realized it.

—The one most guilty of doubting Emilia's resolve, determination, and strength was no one but Subaru himself.

Thinking that he had to protect her, not wanting her to feel sadness or pain— With that as his excuse, he had racked his brain trying to keep Emilia from any hardship. Challenging the Trials in her stead, then seeking shortcuts when that failed, and when even that was hopeless— Worst case, if he could just do something about the Great Rabbits responsible for the time-limit on the Sanctuary. All along, Subaru had occupied his mind trying to find a way to solve everything without Emilia having to take the Trials.

But while Subaru was obsessed with this self-satisfied desire to protect her and devising plans to shelter her, Emilia was steeling her resolve and determination in those nights she spent alone, choosing not to flee, but to face the Trials head on.

All she wanted was for Subaru to support her in that resolve.

Yet, it was none other than Natsuki Subaru who dismissed her from the start.

Subaru: "———!"

The instant he realized it, that unbearable feeling of shame pounced at Subaru's head.

Giving Emilia some unconvincing reply when she needed his response, he gave the worried girl a wave and left, practically fleeing. Then, his legs carried him into the forest, where he was now.

In the Capital, it was with the same selfish conceit that Subaru had wounded Emilia. Paying no mind to Emilia's considerations or resolve, thinking only of his new-found Authority, Subaru gave her no explanation for his selfish behavior and allowed it to open the rift between them.

It was because that happened, and because he confirmed his feelings for her and how he was going to express it, that Subaru was able to stand here now.

—But he was wrong yet again.

Taking on wounds in Emilia's place, shouldering the burdens in Emilia's stead, clearing the path for Emilia's sake. While his current methods lacked any bragging to Emilia or showing off to others, and may appear something of an improvement compared to before, in reality, nothing had changed at all.

He had just gotten better at hiding his wounds.

He had just muted the arrogant self-aggrandizement flaunting his injuries.

But he was still imposing his selfishness on Emilia, screaming that he was right.

Subaru: "I... I... Ugh."

Out of breath and panting as he ran, when he looked up again, a thick branch struck him on the forehead. Bending backwards in pain, he felt his footing reach empty space. Collapsing sideways, tumbling over the dirt and leaf-covered surface, Subaru came to lie sprawled out over the ground. With the frigid soil that would suck all the warmth from his body at his back, drawing ragged breaths, Subaru laid there gazing straight above. Through the gaps between the trees, he could glimpse the night's sky.

In this world devoid of streetlights, amid the prickling, clean air, the stars were brilliantly shining. Under the full expanse of that starry sky, surrounded by constellations he did not know, Subaru felt himself dissolve into a vortex of his own smallness, the anxiety for his uncertain future, his tangible dread, and his disheveled emotions.

Struck by a sudden exhaustion, he could no longer keep himself conscious. This tumultuous time left not only his body weighed down by fatigue, but also his mind, encumbered by the countless labors, steadily drawing him into darkness.

Return by Death. The Witches' tea party. Roswaal's intentions. His conceited self, and Emilia, who had resolved to stand up on her own.

Engrossed in those thoughts, just what would Subaru have to---

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???: "Hell, y'look like shit."

The first things Subaru sensed as he woke were the skin-piercing cold and the sound of the voice addressing him.

His eyelids shuddered in the frigid sunlight as he grimaced while opening his eyes. Unwittingly looking directly into the sun peeking through the trees, his eyes teared up as he tried to right himself,

Subaru: "Gh, aw, hurt... s."

Hearing the sound of his stiff joints creaking, Subaru groaned in pain. The coldness of the soil and air as he laid on the solid ground had stiffened his body, and every movement of his joints was protested by dull pain.

???: "Not sure what you are tryin' to pull here, but sleepin' in a place without a roof ain't what I'd recommend. «When there's a roof 'n a floor, a Gauran gets by», they say."

Subaru: "What's a Gauran... Ugh, never mind."

Shaking his head, Subaru looked up at the source of the rowdy voice--- Garfiel, clicking his fangs and looking down at Subaru on the ground.

Just then, Subaru's sobering consciousness remembered what put him in this situation in the first place.

Subaru: "Ri... ght... I fell asleep like this last night..."

Garfiel: "My amazin' self's smelled ya in th'forest on my mornin' routine and came t'see what's goin' on. Layin' there sprawled out like that, thought someone beat me to it and killed ya overnight."

Subaru: “As the primary suspect, if you didn’t do it, I doubt anyone else would’ve... What time is it, anyway?”

Holding his hand to his forehead, Subaru shook his heavy head and asked. At this, Garfiel snorted with a “Hah”, and,

Garfiel: “No need t’ hurry, it’s still before breakfast time. Aside from th’ early-risin’ gramps and grannies, you’n my amazin’ self’re th’ only ones up.”

Subaru: “So no one’s missed me yet, then... It’ll be trouble if I don’t get back to the cathedral befor... Or, right away, actually...”

If Subaru never returned overnight, Otto, who got back before him, might suspect that something was amiss. Even if that wasn’t a problem in itself, Subaru would still prefer to avoid any anxiety spreading among the Arlam refugees. With the mountains of problems as it is, to cause any further discord because of his own indiscretion would be unforgivable.

Garfiel: “...Yer expression’s different from last night.”

Subaru: “Huh?”

Using a nearby tree as support to stand himself up, Subaru gave his neck a turn when he heard Garfiel address him. Looking back, he saw Garfiel violently scratching at his short, golden hair.

Garfiel: “Yesterday my amazin’ self couldn’t tell if yer calm or not, but now it’s like... Yer face looks fuckin’ refreshed or somethin’.”

Subaru: “———”

Garfiel: “Tch, that ain’t it either. Can’t fuckin’ say it right... Oy, th’ fuck you laughin’ at?”

Subaru: “Kh, hahahaha...”

Hearing Garfiel point this out, Subaru touched his hands to his cheeks. Feeling that the corner of his lips had somewhat slackened, a trembling laugh spilled out of the back of his throat. At first a low, stifled noise, it grew gradually louder.

Subaru: “Hah, hahaha! I look refreshed!? Really, is that what I look like?”

Garfiel: “Yeah, what? Th’hell’s so funny...”

Subaru: “You got it backwards, Garfiel. Just, totally backwards.”

Garfiel: “Ha?”

Pressing back the urge to laugh, Subaru jabbed out his finger toward Garfiel. And,

Subaru: “I’m not refreshed at all. My insides are creaking and pounding, and honestly, right now, I feel like I could burst apart at any second. Everything I’ve tried to do has been invalidated, everything I’ve struggled for has backfired... and I seriously don’t know what to do now.”

Garfiel: “———”

Subaru: “I figured out I’m really in a deadlock, and it actually makes me just laugh. If everything I tried to do was pointless... then I’m right back where I started, aren’t I.”

Muttering powerlessly, Subaru’s shoulders drooped. If he had been mistaken from the very start, then every single thought he had since then would be faulty. With the time limit steadily approaching, only now did he belatedly realize that he had been using the wrong equations. And what’s worse, was those were the kind of problems no one could give him the solutions to.

Garfiel scrunched up his nose, not sure what to say to the dejected Subaru. And knowing that Garfiel wouldn’t give him any straight answers even if he asked, all Subaru felt in return was resentment.

And so, an awkward silence fell between them— Until,

???: “—How about I tell you what you should do?”

Subaru: “———!”

Subaru quickly turned to the voice coming from above, but Garfiel didn’t seem the least surprised as he looked towards the same direction, probably because he had already sensed its presence.

On the other end of their gazes, weaving through the gaps between the trees, it was,

Subaru: "...Otto?"

Otto: "Mhm, good morning. Yep, it's me."

Accompanied by the sound of twigs snapping under his feet, Otto wore a somewhat counterfeit smile as he approached. While his sudden appearance startled Subaru, Garfiel only clicked his tongue.

Garfiel: "Just sayin', my amazin' self's only just found him too. Not like I forgot all 'bout ya t'come chattin' with him instead."

Otto: "I wasn't worrying about anything like that. Just glad we found Natsuki-san safe— Anyway, mind if I make a request?"

Garfiel: "...Spit it out."

Otto: "Might I have a minute with Natsuki-san alone? There's something I'd like to discuss with him."

In front of the still-disoriented Subaru, Otto and Garfiel carried on their exchange with a pretentious air between them. Gritting his teeth at Otto's request, Garfiel glanced over at Subaru,

Garfiel: "Just don't try anythin' funny."

And with that, he left them. Treading over the grass, and out of the forest, Garfiel headed back towards the Sanctuary. Watching him as he left, Subaru wetted his lips with his tongue,

Subaru: "Sounds like you got on Garfiel's good side while I wasn't looking."

Otto: "That's because I wasn't just doing nothing while you are off on your little adventures, Natsuki-san. There's been a deepening of understanding between the refugees and the people living here, and... Well, none of that really matters right now."

Halfway through candidly answering Subaru's question, Otto suddenly dismissed the topic with a wave of his hand and then proceeded to lock his gaze onto Subaru. Or rather, it was far too intense to be a gaze. Its intensity was clearly closer to a glare.

Subaru: "Well, what..."

Thoroughly unsettled by that stare, Subaru only managed a weak mumble. Hearing it, Otto let out a small sigh,

Otto: "While it was only bits and pieces, I still heard what you said. Natsuki-san, it sounds like you are being cornered... by all sorts of things."

Subaru: "-----"

Otto: "Naturally, I wouldn't know the details, being kept out of the loop and all. But you must be at your limits, aren't you? Otherwise we wouldn't hear you blabbering about «What do I do now»."

Subaru: "So then, what do I do...? You said you could tell me."

Listening to Otto's sardonic remarks, Subaru brought up what Otto had said when he first cut into the conversation. Surely, that was what he said when he broke into the silence between Subaru and Garfiel. Just what could he have meant when he said that?

Subaru: "You said... you could tell me what I should do..."

Otto: "Yeah, I know. It's very simple really."

Subaru: "Simp... le?"

Otto: "You want to know what it is?"

That manner of speaking was really getting on his nerves. He'd agonized over his troubles extensively and was in hardly any presentable state. What this person was saying was just plain irritating.

Subaru: "O—of course I want to know! Quit joking around! If there's something you know, then..."

Otto: "Alright, then prepare yourself."

Subaru: "P—prepare...?"

Otto: "Yes. First take a long, deep breath..."

Holding out his hands, Otto motioned for Subaru to take a breath. Though he was unsure what Otto was getting at, Subaru nonetheless followed the instruction and adjusted his breathing, closing his eyes and letting his lungs expand—

Subaru: “———!?”

The next instant, a sharp impact whacked him across the face, sending him flopping to the ground.

Failing to catch himself as he fell, Subaru dropped face-first into the dirt. Quickly shaking his head, looking around to see what happened, he caught sight of Otto brandishing his fist, and, only then, realized that he had been punched.

There, in front of the breathless Subaru, Otto clenched his reddening fist, and declared,

Otto: “You should stop putting on airs when you are in front of your friends, Natsuki Subaru.”



Illustration from Volume 13, coloring by Xarlasar ([source](#))

Arc 4 Chapter 86 - Ignoring All Odds

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 13, Chapter 2 “Ignoring the Odds”, Part 7-9

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#)

Subaru was so stunned by what had just happened that he all but forgot about the pain of being punched.

Toppled across the ground, he looked up to find Otto glaring at him. On that usually pathetic, dead-pan, definitely-not-intensely-emotional face, there was definite, blazing fury in his eyes.

Otto Suwen’s eyes were looking down on Subaru, full of rage.

Otto: “You don’t know what to do, and your head is all messed up.”

Subaru: “———”

Otto: “When you are in a place where you need help, when the strength of your own arms and mind aren’t nearly enough, all you do is frantically scramble around accomplishing nothing but wasting time, isn’t it?”

Saying this to the silent Subaru, step-by-step, Otto drew closer. On his hands and knees, stunned on the ground and feeling the heat swelling on his left cheek, all Subaru could do was stare at Otto.

Otto: “Silence means no denials, and so affirmation. In our world it’s the lowest of deeds, liable only for suckering— You hear me?”

Otto reached his hand to the speechless Subaru and hoisted him up by the collar,

Otto: “If you hear me, say something!”

Subaru: “———!”

A sharp, solid impact rammed into Subaru's forehead, sending sparks flying.

Feeling the world revolve before his eyes, Subaru realized that he had taken a headbutt from Otto. Then again, another headbutt sent him flying backwards. With his forehead and cheekbone aching, Subaru was shoved stumbling backwards. Naturally, no one could be expected to just sit there and take it—

Subaru: "The hell are you doing...!?"

Otto: "Oh, so you were conscious when I beat you just now? I was pretty sure I was roughing up someone asleep, you know."

Subaru: "What are y—!?"

Tearing up from the second headbutt straight to the nose, Subaru lashed back in rage, trying to grab Otto. But Otto slipped aside from Subaru's reaching arms and violently swept out his legs from under him, sending him tumbling to the ground.

Subaru: "Gah!?"

Otto: "Just because blood's finally rushing to your head, you've left your footing unattended. Isn't that just like you, Natsuki-san? Pathetic."

Subaru: "Oh... Really now!?"

Springing to his feet, Subaru threw the fistful of dirt he had grabbed during his fall, straight at Otto's face. But, having read his movements, Otto guarded his face with his arm and quickly closed in before Subaru could react. Just like that, in the time it took to gulp, Otto had placed one hand on the back of Subaru's collar and the other on his waist and tossed him.

Slamming back-first into the ground, Subaru bounced off the impact, choking from the pain. Even though the ground was thick with dead leaves where he landed, that didn't absorb the entirety of the shock.

Gasping, with numbness running all the way to the ends of his limbs, Subaru couldn't get up again.

Otto: "Resorting to dirty tricks as usual, Natsuki-san? As expected of you. Too bad they don't work on me."

Subaru: "...Ghh, khaaaa."

Otto: "See, Natsuki-san? This is what your strength amounts to. You'll never reach the level of a Knight nor that of Roswaal-sama, or even Garfiel. Even against me, you end up like this."

Watching Subaru desperately sucking oxygen into his convulsing lungs, Otto shook his head with exasperation as he prodded him with these words. Walking over to the helpless Subaru's side, Otto drew his face closer,

Otto: "Picking fights with the White Whale and the Witch Cult is ridiculous. You are weak, and the best you can manage in a straight fight is being snapped dead by a single finger. Surely, you understand this."

Subaru: "-----"

Otto: "So, were you going to compensate for your lack of strength with wits? From what I've seen, there is a bit of cleverness about you... But certainly no above-average judgement or decision-making abilities. Even your common sense is lacking."

Not sure what Otto was trying to say, irritation began showing through Subaru's ragged breaths.

By now, the convulsions of his lungs, the shock of being thrown, and the pain on his forehead and cheek had somewhat faded. In their place, what accompanied his returning calm was only confusion regarding the true intention behind Otto's words.

Looking down into Subaru's black, non-understanding eyes, Otto continued,

Otto: "Both your strength and wits are lacking, so if we are to assume you have something else to compensate for this... Well, there's nothing, really. You are small, your reach is short, you are the kind of person that can be found anywhere. You are just a commonplace nobody, and yet you are aiming for these disproportionately great things."

Subaru: "What... are you... even trying to say?"

Otto: "You know that you are powerless and weak, so what's the backup plan you came up with? It's to corner yourself even further, whittling yourself down trying to pull something out of nothing... I finally understand how Patrasche-chan feels."

Subaru: “Patrasche...?”

Hearing the name of his ground dragon, Subaru’s eyes widened in surprise.

Patrasche. The black ground dragon who got herself injured to save a master who didn’t even know why she would do such a thing for him, who had taught him so much and to whom he owed so much— The ground dragon who was so utterly wasted on Subaru.

Now Otto was saying that he understood how she felt.

While Subaru lay there, blinking, Otto stuck his fingers through his grey hair, and, with thorns in his voice, “So, you see”, he continued,

Otto: “It’s fine to show off in front of the girl you have a crush on. That much vanity is necessary, and I’ll respect that. I suppose it’s inevitable that you’ll be boasting things that are way out of your league. So I’m willing to overlook that.”

That would be Emilia. And the way Subaru acts in front of Emilia.

Otto: “And I’ll forgive you for showing off in front of the girl who has a crush on you. Again, that’s necessary. When love is involved, I believe the one on the receiving end carries a certain responsibility too. It’s important to be putting on airs when you are around someone who loves you, so I’m willing to overlook that.”

That would be Rem. Once, Subaru had told Otto the exact same thing. That he wanted to show off in front of Rem, because she was a girl who loved him.

Otto: “But, you see, that’s where you stop.”

With this, Otto stuck his face even closer.

Subaru shrunk up his shoulders in anticipation of another headbutt, but Otto went on, practically snarling,

Otto: “You know that you are lacking. You know that you are insufficient. You want to show off to the girl you like. And you want to be something that the girl who likes you could be proud of.”

Subaru: “———”

Otto: “So, to make up for the parts that you don’t want those girls to see, shouldn’t you be enlisting some help from others? —Say, from a friend?”

Pulling his face away, Otto said the last part holding his palm to his own chest.

Subaru: “Haaaa...”

Listening to those words, Subaru let out a small sigh.

Honestly, for a moment, Subaru thought something along the lines of “Yeah, you are right”.

It wasn’t that he hadn’t hoped he could cling to and rely on someone this way. Of course he had. Like Otto said, Subaru knew that he was weak and lacking. He was not nearly so conceited as to think that he could solve everything on his own.

In fact, all this time, hadn’t he been trying to enlist Echidna and Roswaal’s help to compensate for his own incompetence? And what happened was that far from gaining their cooperation, he instead learned truths he didn’t want to know and was wounded further.

He had already tried to do it Otto’s way. But what Otto’s suggested wouldn’t work at all. That door was already shut.

Subaru: “—Hah.”

Otto: “What’s so funny?”

Reaching that desolate conclusion in his heart, it began to show on his face as well. Seeing this, Otto furrowed his brows in displeasure, while Subaru, with his face red and swollen, looked up to meet his gaze,

Subaru: “You got it all wrong... It’s not like I haven’t asked for help. I’ve already tried everything that might work. I’ve already tried to rely... on anyone I thought I could rely on, and yet...”

His hopes were betrayed, but, not willing to give up, he was left only hugging his head.

In the end, even Emilia, whom he thought he must protect and save, rejected his thoughts. And only then did he realize that, all along, he had been looking down on Emilia as a weakling who needed his protection.

Having experienced various things, met various people, said flashy lines, barked that he would make everything work out, rejected the resolve to die and embraced the resolve to live, and pretended as if he had moved forward if only just a little, ultimately, all Subaru had been doing was marching in place.

He couldn't see a single thing he could do to alter this deadlock. Now that even his forced smile had dried up, only a cold, rigid expression remained on Subaru's cheeks.

Watching this, Otto's lips quivered at Subaru's silent laments.

Otto: "...But, I don't recall you ever asking me for help, Natsuki-san."

Subaru: "———"

Otto: "I'm not worthy of being relied upon, and it'd be pointless... That's how you see me, isn't it? Or could it be that, in your eyes... I'm just another one of those who needs protecting?"

Otto's trembling voice as he tried to stifle his emotions only made his words even more jarring.

This was merely a glimpse of Otto's rage, sorrow, and emotions without an outlet.

Touched by the ripples of Otto's overflowing emotions, Subaru realized that his words had inadvertently hurt him, and he quickly shook his head.

Subaru: "No, you are wrong..."

Otto: "How am I wrong? It'd be strange if I was wrong. If I was, then why are you sitting there alone not telling me anything?"

Subaru: "The fact that I'm not... telling you anything isn't because I don't trust you. You are wrong about that."

Otto: "———"

Shaking his head, Subaru's eyes were wandering.

Meanwhile, Otto fell silent, only keeping his blue¹⁴⁵ irises fixed on Subaru. The pressure of that gaze made Subaru cast down his eyes, muddying his words as he put his hand to his forehead.

It wasn't that he didn't trust Otto. During these loops, Otto had staked his life to protect him, and stayed with him even when there was no profit to be made from it. For that, Subaru was sincerely grateful, and was not lying when he called him a friend.

But how could he tell Otto the truth?

If it was Echidna or Roswaal who could understand Subaru's circumstances, then it'd be fine. The taboo wouldn't be violated, and conversation would be possible. But that was not the case with Otto. Even disregarding Otto, neither Emilia, nor Ram, nor any of the others in the Sanctuary knew the first thing about Subaru's situation.

Without mentioning either the Witch or Return by Death, Subaru couldn't possibly explain the predicament he was in. Even if he could tell them what will happen, about the Great Rabbit and the attack on the mansion— Subaru wouldn't be able to say how he came to know these things in the first place.

Even should he state this information, what could he tell them to make them believe him? Could he even hope for such a thing?

He knew he wasn't strong enough, he knew he wasn't smart enough, and he knew just how useless he was. And so, ultimately, Subaru couldn't do anything without getting help from others, and understood his task was to obtain the help he needed.

But now, having failed to do his job, he had come to a standstill.

Subaru: "I can't explain it. My head's all a mess... like you said, it's all a mess, and... there's no way I can prove anything I say."

¹⁴⁵ Originally, Otto's eyes were described as green. However, I've come to learn that to cultural differences, what is perceived as blue/green in Japanese culture is a bit different from most Western culture. In fact, it seems there was no Kanji that stood for green up until recently! Because of this, I've adapted the text. For more information, see [here](#).

Otto: “...”

Subaru: “It’s all stuff that, even if I told you, you wouldn’t believe any of it... So how can I explain it... It’s like that with you, with everyone, with...”

Otto: “...Why don’t you try?”

Subaru: “—Huh?”

When Subaru told him that he could give him no reason to believe him, that was Otto’s reply. Unwittingly looking up at those words, he saw Otto with his arms folded, looking back at him,

Otto: “So, why don’t you try saying it? Even if it doesn’t make sense and comes out all jumbled because your head’s messed up, I won’t interrupt you, and I’ll listen to the end.”

Subaru: “No, but, that’ll...”

Otto: “Just... out with it!! Didn’t I tell you to stop putting on airs!?”

Otto kicked his foot into the ground, shouting that he had had enough. Then, jutting out his finger at the wide-eyed Subaru,

Otto: “If you have the time to whine about having no proof and how no one’s going to believe you, why don’t you use that time to spit out everything that’s holed up in that head of yours!? Isn’t that way more constructive than sitting there moping!?”

Subaru: “Even if you say that...! There’s no way you’d believe me if I gave you this mishmash...!”

Otto: “—Fucking, out with the mishmash! Then when you are finally done, I’ll reply «I believe you»! Because that’s what friends do!!”

—All the confounded, tangled contents of Subaru’s head was uprooted and blown away by Otto’s shout. Otto’s words were devoid of any real basis, and his logic was not that convincing at all.

Yet, to Subaru who had come to a standstill, it was more than enough of a push on his back.

Subaru: “Well... I don’t expect you to believe any of this, but...”

Little by little, he gave voice to every single one of the problems he had been keeping inside himself, and it didn't even take that long.

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Subaru: "So, yeah... Roswaal's hired an assassin to attack the mansion... in order to corner me and Emilia so we have nowhere to run... Pretty much."

Gingerly watching for any censoring hands popping up, Subaru carefully brought his explanation to an end. Meanwhile, Otto had only quietly listened, albeit with furrowed brows.

Subaru: "And that's all the information I have right now... It may not be all that precise, but that's everything. With nothing held back, all of it."

Naturally, the unspeakable part about Return by Death and the Witches' tea party were a different story. With those parts left out, the foundations of his speech were definitely a bit shaky. Even Subaru himself felt that the everything was connected in way too vague a manner.

As such, he was pretty on edge to see what Otto's reaction would be. Although Otto had promised to say "I believe you" at the end, just what would he actually think about everything he said just now?

Otto: "Natsuki-san..."

Subaru: "..."

After a long silence spent in thought, Otto dropped his folded arms and looked at Subaru. Seeing himself reflected in Otto's green pupils, Subaru unwittingly held his breath. What's he going to say first? Subaru could hear his own heart pounding.

And, to this stiffened Subaru,

Otto: "There's no way I can pretend I didn't hear any of that and just run away, is there?"

Subaru: "Wh— haa!?"

Subaru yelped, thrown off by that off-kilter reply. But Otto shouted right over Subaru's yelp with, "After all!",

Otto: "We are trapped in this place with the Great Rabbit approaching, the only way to get out is if Emilia-sama breaks through the Trials, if we try leaving with just the people not affected by the barrier we'll get stopped by a clueless blockhead, and even if we make it back to the mansion we'll get murdered by an assassin hired by the owner of the mansion... What kind of a situation is this!?"

Subaru: "That's what I wanna know! Why do I have to be herded into a stupid ridiculous situation like this!? I mean I already knew it but is this how much *kami-sama*¹⁴⁶ hates me!? Well, I hate him too!!"

Supposing a god of fate really exists, there is no doubt that god really hates Subaru. And since Subaru didn't think he did anything atrocious to actually deserve this, it was just plain unfair.

But cursing the gods wasn't going to move this situation anywhere nor make things any easier. And, even before that,

Subaru: "Wait, Otto. I can see why you wanna flip out right now, but... you mean you actually believe all those crazy things I said?"

Otto: "———"

Subaru: "That these bloodthirsty Witchbeasts are coming, and even if we wanna run we require Emilia to be successful, that Garfiel'll get in our way, and that Roswaal's already betrayed us for his batshit insane ideas... You really believe all that?"

Saying it out loud again, it just sounded like a list of unfortunate situations all bunched up into one. In particular, the Great Rabbit's advance and Roswaal masterminding the attacks on the mansion lacked any proof whatsoever. Those were the two most important parts, and Subaru had nothing he could use to convince anyone.

For the Great Rabbit, how could Subaru possibly predict the movements of Witchbeasts when almost everyone in the world had already been trying?

¹⁴⁶ Literally meaning "Mr. God". It's neat, so I'm keeping it.

As for Roswaal, why would he be plotting against Emilia, the candidate he is backing in the Royal Selection?

Subaru could explain none of it.

Otto: “Natsuki-san.”

Otto briefly closed his eyes before addressing Subaru’s question. He raised a single finger, and,

Otto: “I’ve been to quite a few places up to now, and I might not look like it, but I’ve interacted with all sorts of people on the way.”

Subaru: “...Unless, you can tell if someone’s trustworthy just by looking at them?”

Otto: “No, I don’t believe in that kind of superstition. When you are a merchant, you’ll come to learn very quickly that there are people who can lie to anyone without a single cloud in their eyes. I’ve had more than my share of experience in that regard.”

He’s bragging about it, but doesn’t that just mean Otto has been duped enough times for him to have learned his lesson?

However, deciding that this was too important a conversation to stick that quip in there, Subaru kept his mouth shut and allowed Otto to continue,

Otto: “Well, after meeting all those people, I’ve also learned to do business in my own sort of way. It’s been four years since I left home and, for better or for worse, I survived.”

Otto made it sound simple, but it probably wasn’t an easy road. He too must’ve been thrown into life-or-death situations more than a few times. In this world, in which one could run into the White Whale just by crossing a field, it’s not hard to imagine the kind of dangers a travelling merchant would have to face. Stray dogs, burglars, those kinds of things.

Otto: “And so, day after day, like this, I’ve managed to make a life for myself as a merchant... And I can confidently say that, up to now, I’ve always picked the side that was favored by the odds. Though things don’t always turn out the way I’d hope... And there were times when what I thought was the winning side turned out to be absolute disasters and were never heard from again...”

Subaru: “Oy, oy, oy...”

Otto: “But, regardless of the outcomes, I’ve always tried to make choices that I don’t end up regretting. When I’m putting myself on the line, I think it’s obvious why that’s necessary.”

Subaru still couldn’t exactly tell what Otto’s criteria is, but it sounded like he always picked the side with the best chances.

Hoping to establish a connection with Roswaal, Otto had accompanied Subaru to the Sanctuary with his personal advancements in mind. On that front, Otto behaved very well as a through-and-through realist. That’s why Subaru figured that Otto would have no reason to listen to his baseless words without the slightest hope of—

Otto: “And so, this is a first, Natsuki-san.”

Subaru: “—Huh?”

Not sure what he was saying, Subaru only stared at Otto with his mouth gaping open. And, seeing this, with a stupidly cheerful expression,

Otto: “Ignoring all odds, and joining the side with no visible chance of success, for me, is definitely a first.”

Otto stated his decision.

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Running as fast as his legs could carry him. Out of breath.

Chasing his bolting heart across the meadow, without a second to lose, Subaru’s body was shrouded in wind. Slicing through the crisp morning air, making great swings of his arms, he sprinted, step after leaping step. Kicking up soil, trampling over rocks, he dashed straight along the shoddy path.

At last, the destined building entered his field of view.

His cheeks twisting with unwitting exhilaration, Subaru bared his teeth. Huffing like a dog with his tongue sticking out, he bounded for the building's entrance, reaching for the door. And,

Subaru: “—Roswaal!!!”

Violently flinging it open, Subaru tumbled into the building. Through the entryway and past the adjacent living room, he shoved open the flimsy door with nearly enough force to break it.

Inside, were Roswaal, sitting up on the bed, and Ram, diligently tending to him, their expressions painted over with surprise.

It was rare to get such a startled reaction from the usually carefree Roswaal and the always brazenly unemotive Ram.

A good omen for the present, where he was attempting something he never had before.

Counting on their surprise to be the winds of his good fortune, Subaru jutted out his finger at the speechless master and servant, and,

Subaru: “—Let's make a bet. Between you and me, using our respective wishes as the chips.”

Arc 4 Chapter 87 - One Oni Outside, Two Clowns Inside

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 13, Chapter 3 “Straight Bet”, Part 2

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Complete](#)

Two astonished gazes landed on the out-of-breath Subaru who had barged into the room.

As far as he was concerned, the two were supposed to be completely foreign to the concept of being surprised. And, deriving some small satisfaction from their reactions, the wicked smile on Subaru’s face deepened.

Roswaal: “—A bet?”

Muttering this, Roswaal narrowed his mismatched eyes.

His face that was usually covered in clown’s makeup was now devoid of any paint. Over the various loops, only once had Subaru seen Roswaal’s real face like this before. His skin beneath the white cosmetics was pale, and there was a certain guileless simplicity to his gaze without his eyeliner— an impression entirely detached from the Roswaal Subaru had known. The shady, calculating figure behind the painted face had swiftly transformed into a clean, upstanding youth as the makeup fell away.

Handsome people are handsome without needing anything extra, Subaru silently remarked as he nodded to Roswaal’s mutter,

Subaru: “Yeah, a bet. Your wish against mine... A real one-shot, winner takes all affair.”

Roswaal: “———”

Subaru raised a single finger, magnificently declaring. As if scrutinizing Subaru’s proposal, Roswaal squinted his eyes. But before Roswaal could give his reply, another figure cut in between their line of sight— the pink-haired maid, Ram.

With Roswaal to her back, Ram's gaze was severe as she faced Subaru. Although, in their day-to-day, Ram tended to scold Subaru every chance she got, and her gaze towards him was always sharp, none of it could compare with what was in her eyes at this moment.

Ram: "Hold it, Barusu. You come barging into the room, and just when I was wondering what you had to say... You mean to further burden Roswaal-sama in his convalescence? There should be a limit to your insolence."

Subaru: "Considering the circumstances, the «I'm sick and injured» excuse won't work anymore. That's got nothing to do with that slick tongue and black heart of his... So he'll just have to suck it up until I'm done."

Ram: "Barusu—"

Subaru: "And nothing you say is gonna change that!"

A blend of perilousness and severity flared in Ram's eyes. But before she could act, Subaru stomped his foot into the floor. Jutting out his finger at Ram, who had cautiously halted,

Subaru: "I've got no reason to stop or hesitate. That's just how much you and I know about each other, right Roswaal?"

Roswaal: "—Mhm."

Subaru: "Or has your motivation gone all the way to zero just because something's deviated from your little diary? How about showing a little backbone and making some effort for your coming selves instead?"

Roswaal: "...That's an interesting way of putting it. My coming selves, is it?"

Subaru tried to get his meaning across to Roswaal without directly mentioning Return by Death. Although Ram furrowed her brows in confusion, Roswaal seemed to have understood. With some vigor returning to his lifeless face, Roswaal addressed Ram in front of him,

Roswaal: "Ram. Stand down... or raaaaaather, could you leave us for a moment?"

Ram: "...! But, Roswaal-sama."

Roswaal: “It’s fine, it’s fine. Even if we are alone, Subaru-kun isn’t thoughtless enough to attaaaaack me. And it would be very easy to defeat him anyway. Wooooouldn’t it?”

Subaru: “Yeah, embarrassing as it is. If we ever get physical, I’m not even confident I can pull him off the bed.”

Watching Subaru flapping his empty hands in agreement, Ram gritted her teeth, and once again turned her worried gaze to Roswaal,

Ram: “—Please don’t strain yourself.”

With this, she gave a solemn curtsy and headed for the room’s exit. Just before passing Subaru, she shot him a sideways glare,

Ram: “—If anything should happen to Roswaal-sama, I will not forgive you.”

Subaru: “You should be more worried about him doing something in a self-destructive fit, you know.”

Seeing Ram off with a shrug, Subaru watched the door shut behind her before turning back to Roswaal. Roswaal’s expression remained thoughtful as he closed a single eye, catching Subaru in his yellow pupil.

Roswaal: “Again, your expression is consiiiiiderably different from when we paaaaarted last night. Could it be that something has changed in your heart in these few hours?”

Subaru: “A change of heart... guess you could call it that. I got a talking to, got into a fight with a friend and... Well, it was a bit too one-sided to be a fight, but it was something of a reaffirmation of our friendship.”

Touching the cheek that Otto had punched, still faintly red, Subaru thought back on the sensations of that morning.

Despite his scrawny figure, Otto was surprisingly strong. Perhaps, that was because the number of ordeals he’d had to go through was far greater than Subaru’s. Subaru thought he had gotten into quite a few predicaments since coming to this world, but it seems that still wasn’t nearly enough.

Subaru: “Seriously, how vicious is this world...”

Roswaal: "I couldn't agree more. Weeeeell, I've already confirmed that I haven't coooooornered you enough yesterday, but the fact that you've come back so early just shows I wasn't mistaken."

Subaru: "I was pretty much at my limit though... I'm just simple-minded, I guess."

It seems Otto's words and fist had knocked Subaru's crooked wits straight. A terribly crude and simple method. There was nothing more childish than having to have a friend beat you onto the right path, and if it had happened to someone else, Subaru would definitely have derided them for it.

Subaru: "But I don't think it's a bad thing. When you find yourself stuck with no way out, it's pretty nice to have a buddy to help figure things out."

Roswaal: "Naive. Green, immature... Ultimately, the suffering of this world can be only be changed by yourself. You have no need for such indolent ideas as relying on friends."

Subaru: "Relying on friends, relying on bonds, relying on feelings... You don't think it'll work?"

Roswaal: "It woooooon't."

Subaru: "Is that so— Then, we'll just have to see who's right."

Roswaal's expression shifted, while Subaru walked up to the bed, snapped his fingers, and pointed straight at Roswaal.

Subaru: "Like I said, let's make a bet. With our wishes as the chips, one round decides all."

Roswaal: "Very well, let's heeeeeear it then."

Having confirmed that Roswaal wasn't outright rejecting his proposal, Subaru turned his finger towards the ceiling,

Subaru: "I won't be following your intentions this time. Not just this time, I have no intention of doing it your way, ever... But, even if I keep insisting on that, we'll never be able to sort out our differences. So let's set a limit."

Roswaal: "A limit?"

Subaru: “Yeah.”

Hearing Roswaal repeat it back, Subaru nodded. Wetting his lips with his tongue, Subaru stared straight into Roswaal’s eyes,

Subaru: “This loop, I’ll break through everything my way. If I fail... starting from the next one, I’ll do things the way you want me to. That’ll be the limit.”

Roswaal: “—Having the ability to rewind indefinitely, you would abandon your right to keep trying?”

Subaru: “You said it yourself. What you did wasn’t enough to corner me. And I agree. If I keep thinking that I can just rewind and get it right next time, I’ll get cocky and everything will just end up like that debacle again¹⁴⁷.”

Though of course, he had no intention of rejecting the concept entirely.

In this merciless world, what could Natsuki Subaru possibly do without Return by Death? Subaru wasn’t so shameless as to completely deny all the benefits Return by Death had given him.

But his mindset had changed. If he had done everything he could and died anyway, he would at least resignedly accept it. But if that was not the case, and he died when he could have lived, then,

Subaru: “It would be an insult to all the people who’d cry for me. I won’t do that anymore.”

Roswaal: “And so, you will set a limit on yourself... iiii it? Though I admit I couldn’t have asked for a more favorable condition, how will you guarantee that you will abide by it?”

Subaru: “Guarantee?”

Roswaal: “Yes, guarantee. It’s quite impooortant, no? Aaafter all, with your ability to rewind, you can easily pretend this promise neeeever happened. If you fail, return to last night, aaand simply decide to try another way...”

Subaru: “Roswaal.”

¹⁴⁷ It’s unclear here, but my interpretation would be Subaru is referring to the final tea party with Echidna, Satella and the others.

As Roswaal voiced his doubts, Subaru quietly called his name.

Cut off by that call, and faced with Subaru's gaze, Roswaal's eyes slightly widened. Then, Subaru carried on with his tone of voice unchanged,

Subaru: "You think I would do that?"

Roswaal: "———"

Subaru: "If you do, then... this conversation isn't going to work at all. That's all there is to it."

Roswaal narrowed his eyes at those words, and lightly raised his hands, sighing.

Roswaal: "No, nooooooooo, let's heeeear the rest of it. I can decide at the end."

Subaru: "...Then here goes. As I said, we'll set a limit. I'll put everything I have into this loop. And if it still doesn't work, I'll do as you say. Since, either way... If this doesn't work, I doubt anything else will."

Roswaal: "You don't sound too confident? But you are resolved... In thaaaaat case, I will respond in kind. Now, you would set a limit on yourself, and make this attempt your last. So what would you requiiiiiiire from me?"

Roswaal's tone was beginning to return to normal.

Seeing that the negotiations have reached a degree of mutual understanding, Subaru clapped his hands together,

Subaru: "My demand is simple. If I manage to break through the situation my way this loop, the future will stray from your expectations. When that happens, you'll probably lose all will to live in a world that has deviated from your Gospel, won't you... That must not happen."

Roswaal: "That must not happen? You mean I shan't lose my determination? Uuuunfortunately, I have to say that is a rather difficult request. Of course, I could continue to pretend on the suuuurface, but in my truest thoughts, I would..."

Subaru: "You know, Roswaal. I don't want us to be enemies forever."

Roswaal: “—Hm?”

Unsure of Subaru’s meaning, Roswaal tilted his head.

Seeing this, Subaru rubbed his finger against his nose, and,

Subaru: “I know you can’t stand a future that deviates from your Gospel and a route that differs from the one you’ve decided on. But even in a future that deviates from your Gospel, I’ll still be busting my ass off to make Emilia the ruler. And I’ll keep relying on the power to redo to make sure of it— Whatever the road we take to get there, at the end, the result won’t stray from your goals.”

Roswaal: “———”

Subaru: “Roswaal, my demand is simple. If I open a path to the future that’s different from your Gospel’s... then you will toss the Gospel aside and join me. I’ll make Emilia King. And I need your help for that.”

No matter how many unforgivable deeds Roswaal has stained his hands with, his strength will be necessary for Emilia’s goals. Subaru himself still harbored a sense of incomprehension and disgust towards him. And if things were left as they are in this timeline, the consequences of Roswaal’s machinations would be irreparable— But Subaru himself will extinguish that possibility and avoid that fatal pitfall.

Hearing Subaru’s proposal, Roswaal let out a long, deep sigh.

Closing his eyes, he sank into thought, stroking his chin as his lips slowly parted,

Roswaal: “So that’s the ultimate compromise you are asking for... Is it?”

Subaru: “It’s all pretty convenient, isn’t it? But y’know, me, I love convenient things. Emilia will do her best to become King, I’ll be rooting for her at her side, and you’ll be tagging along for the ride.”

Roswaal: “That is a difficult thing you ask of me, since I have kept to this one method for such a long, looooooong time. If you want to get me to chaaaaaange now... that would necessitate some equally severe conditions on your end, no?”

Subaru: “Yeah, it would.”

Roswaal squinted a single eye, while Subaru nodded and held up two of his fingers. Feeling Roswaal's gaze focus onto his fingertips, Subaru gave one of his fingers a light wag,

Subaru: "Two conditions. Two conditions you said were impossible and could never be done. If I manage to clear those conditions, I win the bet."

Roswaal: "And if those conditions go unfulfilled, the victory is mine. And I will have you discard your humanity."

Speaking in a low, sonorous tone, Roswaal locked his gaze into Subaru's. At the end of Roswaal's urging gaze, Subaru briefly gritted his teeth with a nod, and continued,

Subaru: "So, the first condition— I will make Garfiel an ally and bring him outside."

Roswaal: "——"

Subaru: "You said his attachment to the Sanctuary means I'll never be able to bring him out of this place. I agree. But while I agree... we'll be needing his strength in the future. Even if we consider the feelings of the people in the Sanctuary, we can't just leave that stubborn, bratty kid in here forever. So, I'll do what you consider to be unachievable and win Garfiel to our side."

Roswaal: "—And the second?"

The moment he heard the first condition, a dark emotion passed through the depths of Roswaal's eyes. But, without remarking on it, he merely asked for the next condition. With a nod, Subaru continued,

Subaru: "—I will have Emilia pass the Trials. The one to overcome the Trials of the Tomb and liberate the Sanctuary will be Emilia. Not me."

Roswaal: "Impossible!"

Shouting, Roswaal slammed his palm upon the bed. A dry thud rang out, as Roswaal's visage contorted in rage. Squaring his shoulders, he jutted his finger towards Subaru,

Roswaal: "I told you last night. That *thing* is incapable of passing the Trials. And Garfiel will never abandon his attachment to the Sanctuary!"

Subaru: “Won’t know ‘til I try, right?”

Roswaal: “Indeed, you wouldn’t know unless you’ve tried. And isn’t it precisely because you’ve tried so many times that you come to me beaten and defeated!? Your visage, and your very resolve now is proof that those two are not worth the investment of your hopes!”

Practically screaming, Roswaal’s shoulders heaved up and down as he spoke. While he took ragged breath after ragged breath, Subaru only calmly faced him,

Subaru: “You are getting yourself awfully worked up, aren’t you?”

Roswaal: “What...?”

Subaru: “Isn’t it to your advantage that the conditions are so harsh on my end? Makes no sense for you to get angry about its harshness, right?”

Roswaal: “It is a matter of whether such a bet can be established in the first place. When it is not just its balance, but its legitimacy that is questionable as well, the very outcome of the bet would be compromised. It’s only natural that I am cautious.”

Being given conditions this stacked against Subaru and this favorable towards himself, Roswaal’s wariness had risen. But seeing Roswaal’s reaction, Subaru’s cheeks twisted, as a vicious, vicious smile deepened on his face.

Subaru: “Roswaal, you don’t seem to get it.”

Roswaal: “...”

Subaru: “Are the odds stacked against me? Well yeah, it’s pretty harsh no matter how you look at it. I admit it’s crossed my mind that this’ll help you save some face while you revise that master plan of yours, but... This is actually referring to something else.”

In front of the speechless Roswaal, Subaru went on with the smile on his face unchanged,

Subaru: “You said it yourself, Roswaal.”

Roswaal: “———”

Subaru: “When I’m driven into a corner, I become the strongest card— It might not be how you wanted it, but this is the strongest card right here, without a doubt. You still dissatisfied?”

Against Subaru’s cutting words, Roswaal remained silent.

He merely stared fixedly at Subaru as he brought the rhythm of his breathing under control. And, once his breathing had calmed, Roswaal raised a single finger,

Roswaal: “—Contract.”

Subaru: “———”

Roswaal: “Very well. I will accept the conditions you’ve preseeented— Break Garfiel out of his spell, and let Emilia-sama liberate the Sanctuary. Once both of these come to pass, I will discard my plans and follow the path you’ve constructed. Let us forge a Contract to this end.”

A dim light flickered atop Roswaal’s raised finger.

The rainbow-colored concentration of Mana looked just like the multi-elemental light Julius had used to destroy Petelgeuse.

Roswaal: “Through our gates, we shall carve this mutual Contract into our souls. No matter whom you may deceive, you cannot deceive your own heart. A Contract carved into the soul transcends distance and time and persists even across worlds. It should continue to bind you even if you rewind and start anew.”

Subaru: “Huh, so you did have something in mind... But, that’s more convenient for me anyway. If we are both bound by Contract, that’ll save me having to drag you around kicking and screaming after you’ve lost the bet.”

Roswaal: “It doesn’t appear as though you are taking this lightly... Very well.”

Seeing that Subaru was willing to accept the Contract, Roswaal said nothing more.

The radiance at his fingertip pressed into the center of Subaru’s chest, and with it, came the sensation of something seeping into his body. Immediately, feeling a wave pulse inside him, opening all the pores of his body, Subaru exhaled a breath.

Subaru: “Ah, haaaa—”

Roswaal: “And the same will be engraved upon my soul— Once Natsuki Subaru’s Contract has been fulfilled, Roswaal L. Mathers’ Contract shall also be fulfilled.”

An identical rainbow burst of light pulsed on Roswaal’s chest. For an instant, the light spread through Roswaal’s entire body, before all returned to normal in the blink of an eye.

Subaru: “So, it’s done?”

Roswaal: “It is done... There’s no taking it back now.”

Confirming their mutual inability to flee, Subaru quietly gulped down his breath. There, Roswaal placed a hand to his own chest, and,

Roswaal: “Just as you will try your utmost to fulfill your conditions, I will also move to actualize the Gospel’s writ. You won’t fault me for that, will you?”

Subaru: “—In five days, the snow will fall again?”

Roswaal: “...If Emilia-sama does not bring the snowfall, I will likely have to briiiiiing it about myself.”

In other words, the time limit is set. In five days, the Great Rabbit will attack. Emilia will have to liberate the Sanctuary, and Subaru will have to break Garfiel’s spell before then.

Subaru: “If that’s decided, there’s no time to waste. I better get started.”

Roswaal: “Subaru-kun.”

As Subaru moved away from the bed to set about his tasks, Roswaal called to him.

Turning around, he saw Roswaal slightly averting his gaze,

Roswaal: “The event at the mansion will happen the same day— Do your best, I’ll be praying for your good fight.”

Subaru: “Because if I try to do everything and botch it, next time you’ll get me to do things your way... Right?”

Roswaal: “———”

Roswaal answered Subaru’s reply with silence.

At this, Subaru gave him a wry smile, and finished it by pointing his finger at Roswaal,

Subaru: “Roswaal, you are throwing off your vibe, so please put the clown makeup back on.”

Roswaal: “Mhm, now that you mention it... this is the first time I’ve received you without makeup on, isn’t it?”

Subaru: “In this world, yeah.”

Subaru could tell that Roswaal’s eyes widened at his insinuation as he turned away. Savoring this reaction on his back, Subaru set out his steps,

Subaru: “This is a match between you and me. A couple of clowns tossed around by fate— So let’s fight it out, fair and square.”

With that, he left the room.

The conditions of the bet are in place— And so, this is where it begins.

Natsuki Subaru’s final challenge, with the Sanctuary’s liberation as the wager.



Illustration from Volume 13, coloring by Setowi ([source](#))

Arc 4 Chapter 88 - Garfiel's Motive

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 13, Chapter 3 "Straight Bet", Parts 2-3

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

Otto: "So, were you able to successfully seal the Contract?"

After issuing his final challenge and concluding his talks with Roswaal, Subaru left the building and took a short walk to join up with Otto. And now, they were in a corner of the cathedral, reporting their respective results to each other. Subaru answered Otto's question with a nod, and,

Subaru: "Yeah, it worked. I was worried he'd just sink into self-abandon and reject the bet outright, but... I think the unfavorable conditions on my end got him through that."

Otto: "Guess so. When you are presented with a bet that's so one-sidedly in your favor, and on top of that, have a blueprint telling you that you cannot lose, it'd be insane not to take it. Of course, I've also considered the possibility that Natsuki-san might go overboard with the presentation and end up without a Contract."

Subaru: "Even if you say that, without a Contract... Wait, you've thought of that too?"

Otto: "Mhm, I did."

Otto crossed his arms nodding as if it were a matter of course. Actually, Otto had just managed to dupe Roswaal, albeit temporarily. Subaru widened his eyes at the thought of it. Seeing Subaru like this, Otto gave a wry smile,

Otto: "Merchants use written documents all the time when more than a few agreements need to be exchanged, but... adept magic users are the ones really into Contracts. And when the person is the leading magic user in the country... chances are he'd take the bait."

Subaru: “By the way, there’s no way he could’ve planted some secret conditions in there, right? Like, he says one thing but binds me with some other Contract.”

Subaru would have no way of knowing if that was the case. The bet’s outcome was supposed to decide the future of their faction, but if the Contract actually says something like “Keep breathing and you’ll die the next day”, Subaru wouldn’t even know.

While Subaru shuddered at his own imaginings, Otto waved his hands,

Otto: “It’s designed so that that kind of trickery wouldn’t be possible. Margrave Roswaal must have said something when you two sealed the Contract? That it’ll be etched into your souls, something like that? It’s only when both parties agree on the contents that the Contract can be established. Unless there was some serious wordplay involved, there’s no way it could be done.”

Subaru: “You make it sound like there’s an exception if you get tricked by a play on words...”

Otto: “...Just between you and me, before all that legislation was in place, when the whole world was still in a more turbulent age, those kinds of scams using Contracts were rampant. If the other party was just some small-time scoundrel then no big problems would arise, but in the case it were a powerful, malevolent mage who’s got his eyes on you, the consequences would be unimaginable.”

Otto shrank up his shoulders in fear, and Subaru also shriveled up his in agreement.

In this sense, Roswaal was a more-or-less passable Contract partner. While he may be powerful, and certainly malevolent, he was driven by his obsessions rather than by pure evil. It should be safe to say that he’d have no intention of abusing their Contract and risk permanently falling out with Subaru.

And even if Roswaal did deceive Subaru this way— Subaru would just use the power of his ability to rewind to utterly annihilate him heart and mind until he relented.

For both their sakes, it’d be best if nothing like that happened, so Subaru opted to keep a minimum level of trust between them.

Subaru: “Anyway, that’s what happened on my end, how did yours go?”

Otto: "How indeed... I'm not entirely sure, to be honest. After all, it's pretty much a gamble in places... And we won't have many chances to get it right, either."

Otto's expression wasn't too optimistic when referring to the duty he had been tasked with performing while Subaru was negotiating with Roswaal. Like Otto said, the task that Subaru had given him was more likely to fail than succeed, and a great deal of gambling was involved. In return, if it did succeed, it would bring them much closer to victory.

The problem was that Subaru wasn't sure just how many more chances he would get in the five days remaining.

Subaru: "Guess we'll just have to wait and see. We better go over what we'll need to do in the limited time we have for now."

Otto: "The most urgent business is Emilia-sama and Garfiel. Specifically, I can't offer any help in getting Emilia-sama to beat the Trials. So that one'll have to fall on Natsuki-san."

Subaru: "Yeah, you are right... I'll have to respect Emilia's resolve to do it herself, and now that I've lost my Qualifications, I can't do it for her anymore."

Still, even if Emilia kept challenging the Trials as she had been, the chances of her clearing it by the fifth day looked dim. Emilia's heart should remain unbroken so long as Subaru stays in Sanctuary, but that wouldn't prevent it being worn down from repeatedly failing the Trials.

She needs to change somehow—and that too, would have to fall on Subaru.

Subaru: "—It's about time we honestly faced each other."

Otto: "..."

Subaru: "I've tried to put it off in all sorts of ways. I think I've been running away because I didn't want to ask her only to realize that there's something irreconcilable between us. And I was hoping Emilia wouldn't have to tell me, since she must also be wishing that I'd never ask her..."

Otto: "—I believe it's important that you tell each other what's in your hearts. If I only knew the silly Natsuki-san you wanted me to see, I'd never have known what'd be coming in five days' time."

As Otto said this, consoling Subaru in his self-reflection, Subaru scratched his cheek in silent gratitude. He was glad that Otto was thoughtful enough not to scold him for ignoring the issue for so long.

Otto: "Or actually, if you've never made it clear to each other, what's with all this talk about liking and loving anyway? Stop pretending to be all pure and innocent already."

Subaru: "...Y—you!"

As they were both feeling embarrassed at that point, Otto quickly threw in a tease that made Subaru's lips twinge. But, having been hit right on the mark, there was nothing he could say.

Subaru's fundamentally good-for-nothing character had invited this outcome, in which various situations are just one step away from where they need to be. But that has gone on long enough, and it was time to stop running.

Subaru: "I'll be going in blind, but I'll try to come clean with Emilia one way or another. I don't want this to fail because I didn't do something when I could have."

Otto: "...Well, I'll trust in your judgment, Natsuki-san. After all, I really don't want to be here on the fifth day when the Great Rabbit comes."

Otto looked as if he wanted to say something else in response to Subaru's words, but he only swallowed it back and looked away. Then, with "Now, there's the other topic", he changed the subject,

Otto: "What do you plan to do with Garfiel?"

Subaru: "The hint is that he's afraid of the outside world. It must have had something to do with what he saw in his past when he took the Trial in the Tomb. If we could just know the details..."

Otto: "Asking him directly is out of the question. He's not the kind of temperate person who'd let just people pick his old emotional wounds."

Subaru: "And if he gets pissed off and smacks us, you and I will have our neckbones pulverized in one blow. I'm becoming increasingly worried about our team combat-wise..."

Disregarding Subaru who is totally incompetent, Otto is basically just a peddler who's been in some rough situations. They aren't martial artists, not by a long shot, and if something like a ranking of everyone in

the Sanctuary by combat ability existed, you'd probably find them faster if you started looking from the bottom.

Subaru: "Now that I think about it, we really need someone to fill that pure-damage-dealer position. There's Roswaal, Emilia, Ram, and I guess Frederica too... It's a bit of a problem for our faction that that's all the combatants we got. So we'll definitely need Garfiel in our ranks."

He didn't include Rem, because bringing her out of her present condition would be the outcome of that battle. Besides, even though he knew it was his own selfishness, Subaru would never want that girl whom he swore to retrieve to ever stand on a battlefield again.

Subaru: "We'll coax Garfiel into joining us with eloquence and finesse. And to do that, we'll have to clear away that trauma of his. As for the missing pieces..."

Otto: "The missing pieces...?"

Subaru: "Since we can't ask the person himself, we'll have to pull it from somewhere else. Ryuzu-san or Ram. Both feel like they'll be tight-lipped about it."

Which side would those two take, now that Subaru was going head-to-head with Roswaal? It's worth a try, even if only to confirm that.

Guzzling down his breakfast and giving his butt a few pats as he stood up, Subaru clicked the bones of his neck,

Subaru: "Right then, time to get started. I'll go try Ryuzu-san for now, and..."

Otto: "And I'll be following the schedule we've talked about... Right. I'll pass the story around to them¹⁴⁸ in advance, but it would be entirely preferable that we could settle all this without using it."

Subaru: "I don't wanna think about it, either. I don't, but... I get the feeling that the chances that we'll end up relying on it are seventy or eighty percent ..."

Otto: "That's pretty high... Though I can't deny it."

¹⁴⁸ "Them" is left intentionally vague here.

They glanced at each other with a sigh, and Subaru shook his head to pull himself together. Then, facing the still deflated-looking Otto, Subaru held up his hand,

Subaru: “Anyway, all that’s left is to do it. Once all of this is done and dusted beautifully, we’ll drink a grand toast to celebrate.”

Saying this, Subaru stretched out his palm as if to show it to Otto. For a moment, Otto seemed to have difficulty understanding, but apparently catching on to Subaru’s meaning, he held up his palm as well,

Otto: “Right, for the sake of my dazzling future as well, let’s give it our best shot.”

Subaru: “You said it.”

Sharing a mischievous smile, their palms struck together. The crisp sound resonated through the airy cathedral, and, amid the gazes of the surprised villagers, Subaru and Otto turned, with each to the other’s back, and began to walk.

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Subaru: “Ryuzu-san, are you homeeee~? I wanna talk to you for a bit.”

Bounding over the uneven ground, through the acrid stench of the room, thinking on how he should have gotten used to that smell by now, Subaru saw beyond the scraps and rubble the gleam of the pale blue crystal.

As ever, inside the crystal was a naked girl in wakeless slumber. Brushing his palm against the crystal’s surface, and once again disappointed by the lack of anything happening, Subaru looked around the room.

The faint blue glow of the crystal was the only light source in the darkness of the chamber. For a place reeking with stench, there were no rats or insects in sight. Thinking about it soberly and realizing that it must be because this place was ridiculously unhealthy, Subaru was finally starting to have some concerns about his bodily condition.

Subaru: “If not even bugs or rats wanna live here, the air pollution’s probably off the charts, huh...”

???: "You can put away those queer worries of yours. It's only the Witch's vestiges looming over this place... The animals instinctively sense it and keep away from here."

While Subaru hugged his shoulders, shuddering, a voice came from behind him, dismissing his worries.

It was a familiar voice, spoken in a young pitch and an elderly tone. Turning around, Subaru caught sight of Ryuzu, walking over with her long hair trailing behind her. Stopping at Subaru's side in front of the crystal at the center of the room, she looked up with eyes the same color as her hair,

Ryuzu: "Now, Su-bo. The fact that you are here... means you already know what I am?"

Subaru: "I got an explanation directly from the manager of this place. Something about taking turns being the representative was also mentioned... Pretty sure I got the gist of it."

Ryuzu: "Is that... so. So that's why Ros-bo was looking strange this morning— Ros-bo must've failed again."

Lowering her eyes, a pained expression rose on Ryuzu's face. Those words made Subaru raise his brows,

Subaru: "Incidentally and unexpectedly, feels like I've just heard a part of what I came here to ask... So Ryuzu-san, do you happen to know about Roswaal's plans?"

Ryuzu: "Only in part, I'm afraid. Unless one's somewhat familiar with his points, there's no way anyone could understand why Ros-bo does these baffling things... Then again, that's also why Gar-bo's angry with him."

Subaru: "A part... how much?"

Ryuzu: "Su-bo?"

His voice dropping in pitch, Subaru took a step towards Ryuzu.

Perhaps sensing the change in Subaru's voice, a look of surprise flashed across Ryuzu's eyes. Subaru bent his knees, bringing his gaze level with Ryuzu's, and,

Subaru: "Tell me, Ryuzu-san. How much of Roswaal's plans have you heard? Depending on the answer, I..."

Ryuzu: "Su-bo..."

If Ryuzu knew Roswaal's plan—to secure the progression of the world as described by the Gospel, ordering Elsa's attack on the mansion, inviting the Great Rabbit to a Sanctuary enclosed by snow, murdering everyone involved, and isolating Subaru to make him forfeit his heart. If she knew all of it, did nothing to stop it, and was complicit, then,

Subaru: "I don't want to despise you, Ryuzu-san. So please, tell me. How much do you know? How much have you been helping Roswaal?"

Ryuzu: "...What I know is that Ros-bo has a Gospel that he's received from the Witch, and he's trying to rewrite history in accordance to its contents. The Sanctuary's continued existence, too, was written in the Gospel. Were it not for that, I would have stopped protecting him a long time ago."

Subaru: "...Is that, all?"

Ryuzu: "That is all. I swear on my words. The Contract I am born with forbids me from ever telling a lie."

Without taking her gaze off Subaru, a sincere expression appeared on Ryuzu's youthful face. Since her Contract forbade her to lie, Subaru chose to believe her.

His rigid shoulders instantly lost their tension as Subaru breathed a sigh of relief.

Subaru: "I see, thank god. If I found out that even you were on board with Roswaal's monstrous designs, I might've come back to punch you after all this is over. Punching a loli-looking Ryuzu-san... just picturing it is horrid."

Ryuzu: "I honestly felt sorry for worrying you... But after what you said just now, I'm not feeling all that sorry anymore."

Hoping to clear the oppressive atmosphere, Ryuzu went along with Subaru's quip. Then, she placed her hand to her chin, and continued with "So,".

Ryuzu: "By the sound of it just now, this is no frivolous matter, I take it? Su-bo, what kind of squabble did you and Ros-bo get into?"

Subaru: "Leaving aside whether it's cute enough to be called a squabble... Right now, we are in the middle of a contest. I can objectively say that if I win, we'll get the big happy finale, so I kinda want Ryuzu's help with that."

Ryuzu: "Judging from the flow of the conversation, this is something about the future of Sanctuary? Just what are each of you thinking, Su-bo and Ros-bo...? Until I know that first, I can't just carelessly accept."

Subaru: "Well yeah. Right, how to explain..."

Tilting his head, Subaru deliberated over just how much information to give her. He had been completely open with Otto, and it didn't seem like Ryuzu was entirely biased towards Roswaal. In fact, her position seemed to be the only reason she was being cordial with Roswaal.

With that in mind, after thinking over the matter carefully,

Subaru: "Simply put... It's about what to do with the Sanctuary after the barrier is gone."

Ryuzu: "What to do, after it's gone?"

Subaru: "I heard snippets from Garfiel too, so the opinion is pretty split in the Sanctuary, right? Those who want to go out, and those who don't."

Basically, those in support were the majority, and those in opposition the minority. But there were extremists in the opposition who would sabotage Subaru and Emilia's attempts to pass the Trials and liberate the Sanctuary.

Having spent over twenty days in Sanctuary, Subaru figured that the vanguard of said opposition would be Garfiel. As such, Ryuzu would be the head of those in support. But just what would she have to say about this difference in opinions?

And just when Subaru was considering how best to continue,

Ryuzu: "A split in opinions...? No, there shouldn't be anything like that."

Subaru: "Huh?"

Ryuzu: “After this place is liberated, whether to leave or to stay on this land would be up to the individual. Most of us would want to follow Ros-bo and leave... and those who stay would stay because they wish to bury their bones in this land. So where is the difference in opinions?”

Subaru: “Uh, eh... No, but...”

The shock of hearing Ryuzu’s unexpected reply sent Subaru’s head reeling.

The stand-off between support and opposition, the supposed antagonism resulting from differing stances regarding the Sanctuary’s liberation— Subaru had been planning to use this as a jumping-off point to redirect the conversation into how to secure Garfiel as an ally.

Subaru: “But, if there never was any contention...”

Ryuzu: “———”

Subaru: “You mean he just made all that stuff up? He was the one warning us to be wary of the opposition, but... was it just so we wouldn’t find it strange if we got sabotaged afterwards?”

If so, that’s a level of thought that isn’t like him at all, Subaru thought.

To divert attention from himself, Garfiel had been warning of potential obstructions in advance, thus removing himself from the list of suspects. As a result, it was only after going through multiple loops in the Sanctuary that Subaru realized that that obstruction was the rampaging Garfiel himself, and that the warning was utterly meaningless.

Subaru: “Why would he go through all these hoops if he really wanted to stop the Sanctuary’s liberation...?”

Ryuzu: “...You are talking about Gar-bo?”

Listening to Subaru’s mutters, Ryuzu seemed to have guessed who he was talking about. Little-by-little, she lowered her eyes as a darkness fell over her expression,

Ryuzu: “The fact that that child doesn’t want to go outside is because of our own cowardice...”

Subaru: “Cowardice... What do you mean?”

Ryuzu: “Just what the word means. We have lived here ever since our birth. And so, we know nothing of the world outside. We don’t know, and so we are afraid. It must torment Gar-bo terribly.”

Subaru: “———”

Subaru could understand what Ryuzu was talking about.

For the residents of the Sanctuary, born into this narrow, closed-off place, the connection to the rest of the world after the barrier falls away would be something utterly unknown and new.

Having lived for so, so long on this land, the anxiety they must be feeling to face something new must be more intense than whatever hope they may have. The prospect of the collapse of one’s mundane, unchanging, everyday life just has that sort of influence over people.

Subaru: “Garfiel doesn’t want the Sanctuary to be liberated because he doesn’t want to see people hurt by the upheaval of their circumstances...? It doesn’t fit his character at all... but...”

If that was really the reason Garfiel so desperately tried to prevent the Sanctuary’s liberation— it’d be the exact same thought process as Subaru’s desire to distance Emilia from hardship.

Garfiel was shutting his ears to the opinions of Ryuzu and the other residents and proceeding with his own stubborn way of protecting them. In that case, if, like Subaru, he could have a proper conversation with Ryuzu and the other residents, maybe this problem would be solved.

Subaru: “No, it’s not that simple.”

Subaru and Garfiel were alike in how they pursued what they seek, but their positions were different. Subaru was failing to get what he wanted because he was weak.

But that was not the case with Garfiel. Garfiel had the strength to prevent the Sanctuary from being liberated. Kill Subaru and Emilia, thus eliminating anyone who could challenge the Trials, and his wish would be fulfilled. The problem is, even if he did this and shut himself in the Sanctuary, there would still be no escape from the approaching Great Rabbit.

But that fact was unknown to Garfiel, and he’d be unlikely to believe even if Subaru told him. The situation would be quite different from when he was explaining it to Otto.

Subaru: "If we are just looking for grounds for compromise, this still isn't it... But, it's strange."

Ryuzu: "Su-bo?"

Subaru: "Why... didn't he choose the most efficient method for stopping the Sanctuary's liberation at the outset, and just kill me and Emilia?"

If he truly didn't care about appearances and was wholeheartedly pursuing a single goal like Roswaal, Garfiel could have taken Subaru and Emilia's lives immediately.

But he had never once attempted to directly harm Emilia. And even the times he did attack Subaru, he only did so after Subaru had taken some drastic action.

Subaru still couldn't clearly identify what Garfiel's trigger for killing him was. There was no doubt that killing Subaru was to prevent the Sanctuary's liberation, but the reason behind it remains unclear.

Subaru: "There has to be a trigger... But, thinking back on those times Garfiel attacked me, was there really anything they had in common...?"

The times Garfiel attacked Subaru were when Subaru flew into a rage at Roswaal and when he tried to escape the Sanctuary with the villagers— ultimately, that's all.

Objectively looking at the scene with Roswaal, it was quite normal to have judged Subaru to be in the wrong for pouncing on an injured person. So there was nothing suspicious there.

The problem was the second time, when he tried to murder a Subaru he had already failed to kill.

Transforming into a giant tiger to kill Subaru, Garfiel set his fangs and claws upon Ram, the villagers from Arlam, and Patrasche who tried to stand in his way. Though Subaru didn't die in the end, passing through the scene of the massacre, the hatred he felt towards Garfiel then still hasn't vanished even now.

But how much of a decision must Garfiel have made before staining his hands with such atrocities? There must have been something that had triggered it. Looking back on it now, it doesn't seem as though the trigger came from Subaru's end.

In other words, the impetus for the massacre wasn't something from Subaru, but Garfiel's end.

Subaru: "Ryuzu-san. Garfiel may seem rough and reckless, but he's not a guy easily moved to violence... would that be a safe assessment?"

Ryuzu: "He is a kind boy at heart. He puts up a hard shell and barks before anything else to protect those around him... The strength he holds within himself is also for that purpose."

Subaru: "Right, in that case... there's only one answer."

Ryuzu: "—?"

Subaru rubbed his nose and turned to face Ryuzu, who was tilting her head.

Then, putting his hand on the crystal at his side and feeling its chill on his palm,

Subaru: "Someone's been feeding Garfiel these ideas. Whoever it is, their actions are what's triggering Garfiel's sudden bouts of violence."

If all those uncharacteristic acts from Garfiel were done on someone else's instructions, then it would all make sense. And the most likely candidates for Garfiel's collaborator would be,

Subaru: "Roswaal, Ram, Ryuzu-san, or some yet-unseen malevolence..."

Someone from that list was inciting Garfiel to violence. He must find them out. And only once he has found them, can he have a real conversation with Garfiel.

Subaru: "Just for reference, Ryuzu-san, can I ask you something?"

Ryuzu: "Hm, what is it?"

Subaru: "—Do you happen to know the contents of the Trial Garfiel took in the Tomb?"

Ryuzu: "...No, I don't. I'm sorry, but that is not within my knowledge."

Ryuzu shook her head. Since she is forbidden to tell lies, what she said must be true. Receiving this answer, Subaru nodded,

Subaru: "Right, then let me change the question— Does another Ryuzu-san know the contents of the Trial Garfiel took in the Tomb?"

Ryuzu: “———”

Subaru: “This time you are silent, which can only mean yes.”

Announcing this to the silent Ryuzu, Subaru slightly lifted his face.

Of the Ryuzu Meyer replicants, there were several Ryuzus acting as the representative of the Sanctuary. This system where the Ryuzus took turns to assume that role day-by-day, created a problem where the individuals did not necessarily share all the memories and experiences.

Four replicants play the role of the representative Ryuzu. If we labeled them A, B, C and D, for the sake of distinction, naturally, not all of A's experiences and memories of her activities during the day would be transmitted to B, C and D.

On the day in question, where Garfiel challenged the Trial, failed, and was dragged out—— the Ryuzu who saved Garfiel then, is not the same Ryuzu standing before Subaru now.

Subaru: “...So the Ryuzu-san who knows about the Trial, when will she show up next?”

Ryuzu: “———”

Subaru: “The Ryuzu-san who spoke to me yesterday said she had taken the Trial. Since as a rule you guys cannot lie, what she said must be true. And if the rotation happens daily... then she'll show up in three days?”

Since he was strapped for time, he would really prefer it wasn't on the last possible date.

At Subaru's almost pleading question, Ryuzu's closed lips softened, as she let slip a sigh,

Ryuzu: “No, the me who brought Gar-bo out of the Tomb will show up in two days. The me who went in, and the me who had not, are on a two-by-two rotation.”

She said, with a somewhat exhausted expression on her face.

Arc 4 Chapter 89 - Memories of Snow

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 13, Chapter 3 “Straight Bet”, Part 4 (greatly abridged)

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#)

—After concluding his secret talk with Ryuzu, Subaru walked through the forest alone.

He told her that he needed to think and left her behind with the crystal. To be standing there before a girl with the same face as her own— her original, no less. How pensive a thing. While Subaru’s interest in all this was inexhaustible, he wasn’t sure how far he wanted to delve into this topic. But, in any case, the Ryuzu he just spoke to was on his side.

These four Ryuzu duplicates. Judging by Ryuzu’s words, two of them had been inside the Tomb. That is to say, two Ryuzus had taken the Trial. As such, Subaru suspected that the one filling Garfiel with these ideas would be one of those two who had taken the Trial.

Seeing how there were four of them, it’s possible that not all their opinions were uniform. Since they all played the same character, all four of them must be the same person; that was Subaru’s assumption, and it had backfired. While those four were indeed playing the same person, they were each individual existences with their own thoughts and ideals.

And so, it wouldn’t be too strange if one Ryuzu had experienced something the others had not, that caused her thinking to diverge from the rest’s.

For convenience’s sake, Subaru decided to label these four Ryuzus Alpha, Beta, Theta, and Sigma. Ryuzu Alpha and Ryuzu Beta do not know about the Trial, while Ryuzu Theta and Ryuzu Sigma do.

What he actually wanted to do was the German Eins, Zwei, Drei, but he couldn’t remember the fourth one so that had to be scrapped. Anyway,

Subaru: “Problem is, meeting with Theta and Sigma will be at least two days from now...”

The timing of the Great Rabbit's attack on the Sanctuary— Or, strictly speaking, the deadline is the moment large-scale snow magic entices the nearby Great Rabbit over, which will be in five days' time. Assuming he probably couldn't come up with a counterplan immediately after talking with those Ryuzus, the remaining three days will offer very little leeway.

In the end, Garfiel would massacre every last villager if it meant preventing the Sanctuary's liberation. If they were the ones who convinced him to do this, Ryuzus Theta and Sigma will not be easily swayed. Considering the prospects of persuading them, the road ahead was indeed looking dark.

Subaru: "But in exchange for the mounting obstacles... there's now an opening for dealing with Garfiel, huh. If I can just persuade the two interfering Ryuzus, then the problem's solved..."

If Theta and Sigma were the ones inciting Garfiel to violence, persuading them would be the equivalent of clearing the Garfiel route. Since Subaru could see no way of working things out with Garfiel directly, this was certainly a glimmer of hope, albeit a fragile and feeble one.

Right now, Garfiel's power was not limited to himself but extended to the twenty-odd non-representative Ryuzus— That is, the empty copies without wills of their own. Without regard for their own individual lives, each copy was a fighting force akin to a machine, and there was not much Subaru could do should Garfiel choose to use them.

Whichever way you look at it, Subaru's situation was beyond challenging. But leaving sentimentalities aside, Subaru would rather avoid coming into conflict with Garfiel. It was all too clear that neutralizing Garfiel with force would be impossible.

If Subaru really had to take on Garfiel, spurred on by Theta and Sigma, and with those girls at his command, Subaru's already slim chances would just drop even lower.

Subaru: "After the flashy way I sealed that Contract with Roswaal, I cannot fail. Not planning to, either. Disregarding whether the insurance will work or not, when standing my ground I gotta do it by my own strength."

Subaru tightened his cheeks just as they were beginning to falter, and shook his head, reminding himself. Then, looking straight ahead once more,

Subaru: “Either way, I’ll have to wing it when dealing with Theta and Sigma. Could also try taking a shot with Garfiel and feel him out early, but... maybe later.”

Coming out of the forest, Subaru returned to the center of the Sanctuary.

The sun had completely risen, and the residents and the Arlam villagers had begun setting about their daily activities around the settlement. Giving them glances as he passed, answering the occasional hellos with waves of his hand, Subaru’s legs carried him straight towards a place separated from the bustle.

To a place a little further away from the cathedral and the center of the village.

—The place where Emilia was sleeping.

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—Whenever she closed her eyes, the memories would come back vivid, even now.

White. A world of white. In that landscape coated in silver, the young Emilia walked alone.

—You mustn’t remember this!

A soundless voice cried, but young Emilia, walking with her head downcast, did not hear.

Anxiously glancing around her, only to be disappointed by the betrayal of her hopes, she went on dragging her feet through the snow.

—Go back! Please! Don’t do anything more!

Young Emilia exhaled a white breath and gazed curiously at the mist expelled from her mouth. Over and over, she went on huffing. Her only clothing were undergarments crafted from thin cloth and a cloak-like garment that covered the whole of her body.

It was not an outfit one would wear with traversing this frigid world in mind, but there was nothing to be done. After all, this was the first time Emilia had experienced a landscape this cold, or had ever seen snow.

The world she knew was a verdant forest abound in warmth and light, one that bore no resemblance to this world buried under ice and snow.

This all-so-familiar place had taken on an unfamiliar face. And this mystified the young Emilia, such that she was even neglecting to react in the way she intrinsically should have.

—No! Don't go any further! Go back! If you don't, you'll...!

Pleading enough to shred its throat, to destroy it, to spit blood, but young Emilia's legs do not stop. The voice would not reach her as the girl's legs heartlessly carried her forward.

Her gait as she traversed barefoot over the unknown snowscape was pitiful. Having lost all sensation of coldness or pain, her feet, cut by stones and branches hidden beneath the snow, marked her tracks with droplets of blood.

Yet, earnestly pressing on, forgetting her pain, and hiding her terror of this unfamiliar world, for what purpose was she pushing forward alone?

—Stop, please... I don't want to watch anymore... Please...

Her pleas would reach no one. Her wish would go unfulfilled. Her hopes would be utterly shot down.

Though she already knew this fact, even in this world of dreams must this cruel fact be thrust upon her— By manner of showing her past self, and her greatest mistake.

Young Emilia: “———Hk.”

Young Emilia's amethyst eyes, as if sighting hope beyond the haze of the obscuring snow, sparkled.

Her eyes had landed on, as far as young Emilia knew, the trunk of the tallest tree in the world. The great tree they called the Tree of Prayers was the sacred channel through which they poured their prayers to the divine and unknown. An existence treasured and revered by all who lived in the village.

Young Emilia, too, obstinately believed that by touching the great tree's trunk she could feel its tremendous blessing upon her skin.

How reassuring it must have been in that moment to see that great tree in all its grandeur exactly where it should be.

How much of a salvation it must have been to see, amidst that familiar setting transformed into this strange and alien world, that great tree persevering as a token of her everyday life.

Huffing breath after white breath, Emilia clumsily rushed over to the great tree. The piling snow buried young Emilia up to her knees, so although the tree wasn't far away, the girl tumbled time after time, leaving imprints of herself upon pure white snow.

And, after falling face-first multiple times, with her nose red from the cold of the snow, Emilia reached the base of the tree. Her tensed expression slightly relaxed with relief. Although, since her muscles had grown rigid in the cold, a twitch was all it amounted to.

Young Emilia: “———?”

Then, as she reached her hand towards one of the roots of the tree, young Emilia seemed to have noticed something. Sliding her hand along the root, with frozen fingers she began digging at its snow-buried tip.

—Stop!!

She dug, and dug. With singular purpose, spurred by burning impatience, young Emilia dug through the snow.

—Stop! Stop stop stopstopstop!

Not wanting to watch. Not wanting to remember.

Wishing she could look away, shut her eyes, block her ears, and scream to tear this world asunder.

But her non-existent face, non-existent eyes, and non-existent ears could not be dissuaded.

Young Emilia's fingertips touched something.

Slowly, with her own hands, the girl peeled away the last patch of snow—

—STOP IT!!

...

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???: “—*You are truly beyond saving.*”

Emilia: “——”

???: “*Proof of sin. Proof of impurity. Be cursed and cursed and cursed, and at the end of your suffering...*”

Emilia: “——”

???: “*Just die— Daughter of the Witch*¹⁴⁹.”

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???: “—Emilia? Emilia? Oy, are you alright!?”

Emilia: “Ah, eh... Uh... Suba... ru...?”

Woken by someone shaking her shoulders calling to her, Emilia opened her eyes and muttered Subaru’s name. She shook her head to recover her hazy consciousness, but,

Emilia: “Subaru, why... are you here...?”

Subaru: “Do I need a reason to be? If it’s Emilia-tan’s face, I can keep staring for a whole day without getting bored.”

Emilia: “Not that, I mean... Umm.”

¹⁴⁹ Translation note by SummaryAnon: “This term (魔女の娘) can mean either «Daughter of a/the Witch» or «Young Girl who is a Witch». Though my instinct says it’s 9:1 odds the former, it’s not perfectly clear which one is it supposed to mean.”

Perhaps because her consciousness hadn't fully cleared, Emilia's response was still somewhat unsettled.

To wipe away her anxiety, Subaru patted his knees as he stood up with a smile,

Subaru: "Can't have you letting down your guard around me. I'm really happy you trust me, but I'm still a guy holding a ravenous wolf hiding under this cloak of rationality. I'd like you to be a little more mindful of the kind of person I am, Emilia-tan."

Emilia: "...? I didn't forget about you, Subaru. I said something strange while I was waking up, that's all... But, dozing off without even realizing it..."

Although it didn't sound like she understood what Subaru was telling her, Emilia's voice as she replied indicated that she was more or less properly awake. Having confirmed this, Subaru gave the troubled-looking Emilia a nod,

Subaru: "I get that the exhaustion's piling up, but if you are gonna sleep it's better to sleep on the bed. If you keep sleeping on the floor like this, it's gonna give me a heart attack every time I come in here."

Emilia: "...Ah, I'm sorry. I made you worry, didn't I?"

Subaru: "And I just when I had renewed my resolve as well, seeing this and thinking some new *dekikoto*¹⁵⁰ was triggered and had ruined everything got me in a panic, you know. You can even say that seeing your sleeping face today was even more emotional than usual..."

In fact, the shock that struck Subaru when he walked into the room and saw Emilia was beyond description. Getting no response when he knocked and thinking maybe she had gone out, he entered the room to find Emilia lying in front of the bed, her silver hair sprawled across the floor.

Surely, no one could blame Subaru for falling into instant despair at that bloodcurdling sight.

That said, the warmth of her body when he held her up and the unmistakable rhythm of her breathing and pulse quickly dispelled those worries. However,

¹⁵⁰ English flip. Means "incident/event" (出来事), originally "イベント" (event). Can also be pronounced "dekigoto". Wow, it's been a while since we've last had English, hasn't it?

Subaru: “If that was all of it, I would rather have let you keep sleeping, but... you looked like you were having a really bad nightmare. Was it wrong of me to have woken you up?”

Asleep in his arms, Emilia’s brows were covered in sweat while her face and body twisted in agony. Subaru had personal experience of this himself, and he knew that there is no way to escape from a truly terrifying nightmare. The only way to be swiftly released from the pain was to be called from outside the dream. To Subaru, who did exactly this, Emilia shook her head,

Emilia: “No, I’m reeaally glad you woke me. I was having a pretty... No, a really terrible dream... So, thank you.”

Subaru: “A terrible dream, haunting Emilia-tan... I kinda wanna ask what it’s about, but... I can tell it’s not something that’ll be pleasant to talk about.”

Emilia: “———”

Seeing the wry smile following her silence, Subaru pondered over the cause of Emilia’s nightmare. Most likely, it was the result of the negative circumstances piling around her. He wasn’t sure what specific images she saw, but,

Subaru: “...Alright, I won’t push you to tell me.”

Seeing Emilia look away as if trying to avoid the topic, Subaru figured it was probably the vivid kind of nightmare. If it were vague, it’d be easy to talk about. But the fact that she couldn’t, meant that it must’ve been something lifelike and real.

This interaction with Emilia was getting off to a bad start, and it wouldn’t make it any easier to carry on the conversation to come.

With a troubled expression, Subaru scratched the tip of his nose, deliberating over how to broach the topic, when Emilia looked up.

Emilia: “So... What is it, Subaru? You couldn’t possibly have come here just to look at my face for no reason, right?”

Subaru: “«Couldn’t possibly»... I don’t think it’s that implausible of a thing for me to do?”

Emilia: “No, you wouldn’t. I mean, you are always busy running around trying your hardest. You can’t use up your time just on me like that.”

Subaru: “Emilia-tan, just how diligent a guy am I in your imagination? You do know that I’m such a slacker that I’d wholeheartedly support the establishment of a Blob-Out Appreciation Day, right?”

No exaggeration and no joke, Subaru was well-aware of his nature as a hopeless layabout. When you see a person with no role or purpose in endless descent into depravity, you’d call that person Natsuki Subaru. And that was why he never slacked on his daily workouts and pointless skill and hobby training back in the old world. Because he knew he’d become an utterly hopeless human being the moment he did.

—You can’t really call someone who puts in persistent effort, even without any goal, a slacker. But Subaru didn’t seem to realize that rather obvious fact.

Perhaps wanting to say something about Subaru’s overly critical appraisal of himself, Emilia’s gaze warmed as she heard his reply. Seeing this, Subaru furrowed his brows, but Emilia didn’t remark on it in the end.

Emilia: “It’s fine. Anyway, tell me why you are here already. Huuurryyyyyy uuuuuuup~”

Subaru: “What’s with the sudden bout of cuteness...! Uhhh, but, right. I was thinking maybe we could go outside for a walk to lighten up the mood a bit...”

Emilia: “———”

Subaru: “Though, that wouldn’t really lighten it up, would it...”

Seeing Emilia fall silent, Subaru realized he misspoke and scratched his head.

It was obvious from the fact that Emilia’s residence was placed apart from the village center that she wasn’t well-received in the Sanctuary.

Being fellow outcasts of their respective races, there really should be a sense of fellowship between them, but it would seem that the negative image surrounding half-elves was a special case. For the refugees from Arlam, their safe escape from the Witch Cult did not directly improve their opinions of Emilia as well.

Emilia's treatment in the Sanctuary was no different from her treatment in the Capital— Like that of a tumor.

She acted strong when she was with Subaru, but that didn't mean it was easy for her. And just how did she deal with all those gazes when she was alone?

Being that the situation still hadn't improved, bringing Emilia outside would only place an unnecessary burden on her.

Subaru: "It's because of stuff like this that I..."

Aggravated at his own thoughtlessness, Subaru punched himself in the forehead. Feeling the pain flood over from his knuckles to his skull, Subaru turned to face Emilia, who had widened her eyes at his inexplicable act,

Subaru: "Emilia."

Emilia: "—Mm."

Seeing the change in Subaru's expression, Emilia sensed that the atmosphere had shifted. She corrected her posture, and, with a calm emotion in her amethyst eyes, she looked back at Subaru.

Her expression told Subaru that it'd be pointless to broach the topic in a roundabout manner. But just how should he say it? He puzzled over his opening line for only an instant, and,

Subaru: "Do you... feel like talking with me about what you saw in the Trial?"

—Subaru could plainly see the horror and anguish washing over her tearing, amethyst eyes.

Arc 4 Chapter 90 - —I’m Sorry

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 13, Chapter 3 “Straight Bet”, Part 4, and Volume 14, Chapter 1
“—Journey of Memories”, Part 1

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

—Though he was supposed to have confirmed his resolve, the moment Subaru saw the waves of emotion in her tearing eyes, he felt himself struck with regret.

Asking her that question was no different from ripping open the scars inside Emilia’s heart— clawing at her unhealed wounds while using concern as his justification.

The pain of this realization was no less than the pain he must have made her feel.

Subaru: “The Tomb’s Trial shows you the past... That’s what everyone told me.”

Emilia: “———Hk.”

But, in search of what lay beyond that pain, Subaru treaded even deeper.

Biting down on her lips, a tremor flashed across Emilia’s expression, but her trembling pupils did not look away from Subaru.

For now, he decided it’d be best to avoid mentioning that he had taken the Trial. He wasn’t going to make the sort of frivolous comment like “If I can beat it, you can beat it too”, especially not now that his Qualifications had been revoked. Besides, even if he did, she might very well mistake it for a comforting lie.

If that’s how it’s going to turn out, then he might as well just tell Emilia his honest feelings.

Subaru: "I'm guessing that's why you came back like this... You are agonizing and hurting, yet you keep it all to yourself, and... you are going to challenge the Trial again tonight, aren't you?"

Emilia: "———"

Through those four repeating worlds, Emilia had never conveyed the details of her Trial to Subaru. This was partly because Subaru had been practically ignoring her right to challenge the Trials by deciding that she didn't need to be the one to clear them, but also because Emilia never had a chance to talk about it with Subaru.

The former had been resolved by the fact that Emilia was now the only one who could challenge the Trials, and ideally, the latter was in the process of being resolved this very moment.

Hearing this, Emilia's cheeks stiffened as she cast down her gaze. But before her eyes and their long lashes completely left him, Subaru continued.

Subaru: "But, still."

Emilia: "———"

Subaru: "The crushing burden you are carrying, won't you share some of it with me? If you are afraid to look back on past, how about letting me stand by your side as you meet it?"

The downward tilt of her head halted as she timidly looked up at Subaru once more.

He mustn't let her see the weak, indecisive self that he was. And so, with entirely unwarranted abounding confidence, Subaru puffed out his chest as he accepted Emilia's gaze. After all, bluffing and baseless self-confidence were precisely Subaru's specialties.

Subaru: "Come to think of it, I barely know anything about you, Emilia. I like you... and part of it's because I really like the way you look, but in the time we spent together, everything that I've seen of what you are like on the inside has made me fall unbearably in love with you..."

Emilia: "———"

Subaru: "And that's why I can say with my head held high that I like you just the way you are now. But, as for what you went through, how you felt, and what you thought before you became the person you

are now... I don't know a thing about that. Because I didn't feel I needed to know. Because the present and future are more important than the past... But."

Emilia: "...But?"

Subaru: "Now, you are in a situation where you need to look back on your past, and you are saying you are afraid to face it alone... Will you give me permission to stand beside you, so we can face what must be faced together?"

His permission to suffer Emilia's hardships for her had already been revoked.

So now, Subaru was asking for the permission to support Emilia from her side, and give her his shoulder to lean on when she is exhausted and close to collapse. It might only amount to a superficial consolation, but surely, there will be a time when that consolation means all the difference.

Emilia: "——"

Subaru waited intently for Emilia's reply.

The wavering of her eyes spoke volumes of the intense conflict inside her. Hesitation and indecision, guilt and self-loathing. The various emotions raged inside Emilia's slender body in a voracious frenzy.

Until finally, Emilia quietly muttered,

Emilia: "J—just, by being here... you are already helping me just by being here for me... and so, to trouble you any further would..."

Subaru: "Being troubled by Emilia isn't trouble for me at all. It makes me happy to be able to do something for you. And when you are in trouble and want someone to offer you a hand... I want to be the first person to reach out and help you."

Emilia: "—Hk."

Subaru proclaimed once more as Emilia weakly tried to dismiss his proposal.

As long as Emilia doesn't refuse him outright, Subaru had no intention of withdrawing. He was well aware that he was treading on a topic she didn't want to talk about, and no amount of half-hearted refusals was going to dissuade him. Subaru had not forced that Contract upon Roswaal with such flimsy resolve.

Still conflicted, Emilia firmly closed her eyes and drooped her head.

Emilia: "Subaru..."

Subaru: "——"

Emilia: "Subaru, do you really believe..."

The words that were supposed to follow did not leave Emilia's lips. Her nobility would not allow her to give voice to those cowardly words. She could not do something as disgraceful as to doubt the person appealing to her with sincerity. If she did, she'd be making the same mistake as when Subaru tried to impose his selfishness upon her.

Even when cornered, Emilia's spirit did not lose its dignity.

And so, Subaru did not pursue the matter further while Emilia slumped her shoulders, regretting those words.

Emilia: "...Ask me what you want to know, Subaru."

Subaru: "..."

Emilia: "If I'm the one explaining it, it'll just turn into an incoherent mess... So, it'll be better if you ask the questions."

Subaru: "...Is that alright?"

Emilia: "—Mhm. I'll just think of it as another one of my Trials."

Emilia said resignedly, her smile fleeting, and for a moment, Subaru was left at a loss for words. Then, shaking his head to compose himself, Subaru pointed at the bed, suggesting a change of location.

Subaru: "Anyway, this might be a long conversation, so how about we sit down?"

Emilia: "...Yeah, you are right."

Correcting her posture, Emilia seated herself on the bed. Subaru pulled over a chair, and sat down facing Emilia.

Smoothing out the wrinkles on her clothes, Emilia waited for Subaru to speak. Having reached that crucial juncture, Subaru hesitated for only a few seconds on what to ask first, before coming up with the words.

Subaru: "What kind of past did you see in the Trial, Emilia? Going by what I heard from someone in the know... it's something like the memories of your regrets?"

Subaru asked, carefully choosing his words so that she wouldn't notice that he had taken it.

The First Trial was facing your past. But that doesn't mean the past that Subaru saw was a past that actually happened. It was a fresh theatrical production based on his guilt and regrets towards his family in his original world.

So then, just what was the Trial like for Emilia?

Listening to Subaru's question, Emilia remoistened her parched lips, and,

Emilia: "The... past that I saw, was... probably a memory from before I went to sleep."

Subaru: "—? Before you went to sleep...?"

Emilia: "Yes, before I went to sleep. The memory is vague, and not very clear, but... I was still small in it, so that's only to be expected."

Emilia closed her eyes as she searched through her memories, while Subaru seemed to be confused by her explanation.

He could understand what she meant by "I was still small". Most likely, the Trial was showing her past from when she was young. But, "before I went to sleep" was the part Subaru couldn't understand.

Subaru: "Hold on... What do you mean before you went to sleep? It's not like when you go to bed at night, right?"

Emilia: “No, it’s not. Before I went to sleep means... before I fell asleep inside the ice in a great tree in the forest. That was reeaally, really long ago.”

Subaru: “«Inside the ice»... what’s that supposed to mean?”

With no context being given, Subaru wasn’t sure if she was making it impossible to understand on purpose.

But regardless, Subaru’s imagination brandished its claws, dragging its chilling edges down his spine. Feeling the burning impatience pounding against his chest, Subaru tried to keep himself calm as best as he could.

Subaru: “Please answer me... Emilia. What do you mean by «inside the ice in a great tree»?”

Emilia: “...It’s exactly what it sounds like.”

Subaru: “———”

Pausing for a beat, Emilia looked up and told Subaru.

Emilia: “All that time, I was frozen with the great tree in the forest. And it was only after a reeaally, really long time... that Puck found me.”

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Puck: “—I’ve finally found you.”

—Who’s there?

Puck: “Sorry... I’m sorry. I’m so sorry... for leaving you here alone. I’ve been searching forever. Constantly, and constantly, I’ve been searching and searching for you}

—Where... am I? It’s so... cold.

Puck: “I’ll get you out right away... Such a lonely place, all by yourself... Why did a child have to go through... Why did it take me so long to...”

—Say... who are you? Why... are you crying?

Puck: “—Because you are the loveliest thing in this world. Because I’m so happy to see you again.”

—You are... that glad?

Puck: “Yes. It was for you... It was to see you again, that I was reborn.”

—Who are you?

Puck: “I... I’m your greatest companion. Your one greatest, truest companion.”

—Then, you are my...

Puck: “—Yes, that’s right. From this day forth, I will be your family. From this moment onward, you’ll never be alone again— This, I promise you.”

—Really? Then, I’m...

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Emilia: “—Reeeeeeaally glad.”

Emilia held her hands to her chest, reminiscing on a happier time. Listening to her words, Subaru felt his mouth rapidly drying.

Emilia, sleeping inside the ice. Inside the Great Tree of Prayers of her homeland. Frozen within its trunk, Emilia remained there until Puck saved her.

Just how long a time was it—?

Subaru: “Emilia... the place you lived in would be Elio Forest, right? The one that was frozen a long time ago, where the ice is gradually spreading even now?”

Emilia: “Mhm, it is. By the time I woke up, they were calling it the Forest of Ice— But it used to be a bright and luscious place, bathed in sunlight, before I went to sleep. It never snowed when I lived there with everyone.”

Subaru: “Luscious... No, more importantly... who’s everyone?”

Subaru didn’t know much about that place, so the before-and-after of Elixir Forest was unknown to him. But here, it was something else that caught his attention.

Emilia: “Everyone is everyone. Everyone I lived with in the forest... all the elves.”

Subaru: “The elves... Then, your family was there too? Your mom and dad, and... maybe siblings, too.”

Emilia: “———”

However, seeing Emilia’s eyes filled with sadness, Subaru once again realized that he had misspoken.

Emilia must’ve said it at some point before. That Puck was like her foster parent, and her only family. Subaru was supposed to have known that Emilia had lost her family in one fashion or another.

Subaru: “I’m sor... I didn’t mean...”

Emilia: “It’s fine. You are just worried for me, Subaru... But my family wasn’t in the forest. Everyone in the village was very kind to me, and always smiled at me, but... There was nobody in that forest I could call my blood family.”

Subaru: “...If there was no one, then, your parents were...?”

At that question, Emilia quietly shook her head. She fiddled with the ends of her braid as if to distract herself, then,

Emilia: “They were both gone by the time I was self-aware. I didn’t think it was all that strange at the time... I did have someone who was like a mother to me... who was reeaally kind, and strong, and cool... I had someone like that.”

Subaru: “———”

Emilia: “But that person, and everyone else... When I fell asleep, they all went to sleep as well. Even now, deep in Elio Forest, so many people remain there in slumber, without waking up.”

Subaru: “Haaaa—!?”

Speaking in a dispassionate voice, Emilia seemed to be tasking herself to state only the facts. Subaru's throat clogged up at the content of her words, but Emilia paid it no mind as she continued.

Emilia: “After I woke up, Puck and I went on watching over everyone sleeping. So that someday, when someone wakes up like I did, they wouldn't feel lost, not knowing anything... Thinking this, we stayed there.”

Subaru: “...Hold on a second.”

The information load was so dense that Subaru's brain was struggling to keep up.

What on earth happened in Elio Forest on the day Emilia first saw it snow?

Subaru: “From what I know, Elio Forest began freezing... a little over a hundred years ago... I mean, I must've heard it while I was in the Royal Selection Hall or something.”

Emilia: “Mm. I was reeaally surprised too when I went to study at the mansion and learned of this.”

Subaru: “So, you were there when Elio Forest first froze, right? Do you know how it happened?”

Emilia: “—No, I don't.”

Emilia shook her head to Subaru's question. Seeing Subaru furrow his brows, she looked down with a pained expression.

Emilia: “I really don't. Whatever happened back then... I can't remember it clearly at all. All I remember is that I was little, and I was terribly scared. But since I went on sleeping for so long, those memories are vague too...”

Subaru: “You mentioned that you were little... but about how old were you back then?”

Emilia: “...I think... I was around seven.”

Subaru: "Seven... and it's safe to assume that elves count their age the same way as humans, right?"

At this, Emilia nodded.

If elves count their age the way people normally do, then it'd increment by one every passing year. Elves are well known to be a long-living race, and Emilia, being a half-elf, should be the same. On the other hand, even long-living elves must go through childhood, so the seven-year-old Emilia was beyond any blame.

Although, with some simple arithmetic, this means that Emilia's current age would be seven plus a-hundred-odd years.

Subaru: "The age gap's nothing to worry about at this point... And considering we are from different worlds to begin with, that's nothing, really..."

Emilia: "...Subaru, what's wrong? Did I say something funny, or..."

Subaru: "Nope, nope. I was just thinking that you and I have a really serious age gap, that's all."

While putting his thoughts in order and catching his breath, Subaru threw in a joke to lighten the mood. Although the joke was probably lost on her, Emilia's tense cheeks did relax somewhat as she let out a small sigh,

Emilia: "We do... But since I was asleep and unconscious for so long, I'm not really sure I've matured to my real age..."

Subaru: "Really? I don't exactly know how fast elves grow, but if it's anything like humans, I'd say you are pretty matured."

Subaru casually looked over Emilia on the bed before snorting off her worries.

Her limbs are fully grown, and her body hosts the curvature of womanhood. Her gloomy, amethyst eyes and uncertain features prominently give her a mysterious beauty, somewhere between that of a girl and woman. Emilia was plenty enough matured already.

But it seems Subaru was missing the point of Emilia's worries, while with a "No", she shook her head.

Emilia: "Sleeping in the ice did not stop time for me, but only put my consciousness to sleep. So my body kept growing even inside the ice. Controlling my body felt so different from when I went to sleep that, for a time after I woke, I stumbled over so many things."

Subaru: "So being in that ice... Also had its flaws, huh."

Having her seven-year-old body when she fell asleep turned into a fully-grown woman when she woke must have been bewildering for her.

It happens quite a lot in anime and manga for children to have their bodies suddenly turned into adults, and the adaptation must not be easy. It's only natural that Emilia would've been distressed by the discrepancy between her mind and body.

Emilia: "When Roswaal brought me out of the forest to study outside... and I learned that I had slept for nearly a hundred years, I was reeaally shocked. To find out that I had been sleeping for so long..."

Subaru: "If people age normally inside the ice... Then for anyone other than long-living elves it'd be all ov..."

"Over", was what he was about to say, when he noticed that he had just been told an incredible fact.

Shutting his eyes, Subaru quietly put the numbers together in his head. Adding and subtracting, and then rechecking it several times just to be sure, his doubts turned into definite suspicion.

Subaru: "Hey, Emilia... you just said you slept for nearly a hundred years?"

Emilia: "I did, yeah...?"

Subaru: "And you were about seven before you went to sleep, right?"

Emilia: "I was. Subaru, what's..."

Subaru: "Emilia. How long has it been since Puck woke you up?"

At least, from what he had heard, Roswaal brought Emilia out of the forest about half a year ago. Which means Emilia would have lived with Puck in Elixir Forest until then. The question is, how much time had passed between her falling asleep, waking, and meeting Roswaal?

Still with a troubled expression, Emilia placed her finger to her lips.

Emilia: "...About, six or seven years... Give or take."

Subaru: "-----"

Hearing Emilia's answer, Subaru's suspicion turned into absolute conviction.

The fact shocked through Subaru's body like a lightning bolt.

Seven years after she was born, she spent nearly one hundred years sleeping, then spent another seven years awake. Which would mean that---

---Emilia is around a hundred and seven years old. Looks like she's eighteen. While mentally, she's fourteen.

Subaru: "Her actual age, apparent age, and mental age... are all messed up..."

That kind of discrepancy was only possible because she is an elf.

So many questions Subaru had about Emilia's behavior up to now suddenly made sense. Subaru had found her rather ignorant to flattery for an over-a-century-old elf, and he couldn't help noticing her disproportionate lack of experience of being around people, plus the cuteness of her occasionally childlike demeanor was always quite conspicuous.

So all of it was the result of having spent the majority of her life in the ice...

Subaru: "Fourteen... No different than Felt..."

Why did a girl this young have to shoulder such great responsibility? Subaru's irritation towards the Royal Selection and for Roswaal was only mounting.

Then, reflecting on how the topic he brought up to lighten the mood had completely derailed, Subaru cut into another certainly-not-unrelated topic.

Subaru: "Earlier, you said you don't know why the forest was frozen. So then what did you see in the Trial? That vague memory of before you were frozen... That's what you saw, right?"

Emilia: "...I think so. The scenery was definitely from before I went to sleep... So I think it's a memory of a time that really existed."

Subaru: "So then, maybe the fact that you are so terrified of the memory is because in it you encountered whatever froze you and the other elves, and you are subconsciously rejecting it..."

Emilia: "—That's not..."

Subaru: "I mean, it doesn't get scarier than that, right? The Trial shows you your greatest regret. So maybe what you are seeing is..."

Emilia: "I said you are wrong!"

Emilia shouted, shattering Subaru's overheated train of thought. But she immediately blinked in a show of regret for raising her voice, and then closed her eyes to shake off her hesitation as she turned her watery eyes to Subaru.

Emilia: "That's not... what I saw in the Trial. It wasn't anything like that... What I saw was..."

Subaru: "E—Emil..."

Emilia: "—Devil Child."

A chill like an icy spear pierced into Subaru's spine.

Emilia buried her face in her hands, hiding her expression. From beyond her covered face, her voice continued quietly, without emotion.

Emilia: "Seed of calamity. Silver bastard. Creature best unborn. Source of hatred. Unforgivable soul. Devil— Daughter of the Witch."

Subaru: "——"

Emilia: "Everyone who was kind to me, who smiled at me, said those things to me in the freezing snow, and..."

Emilia's limbs, and her entire body, was faintly trembling.

Emilia: “I don’t remember anything that happened after I was inside the ice. But I can’t forget how everyone must have cursed me, frozen there. And how they must continue to curse me still.”

Subaru: “———”

Emilia: “And so, I want to free everyone from the ice... and apologize.”

Absently, with her face in tears, Emilia looked up, as if seeing them, before quietly bowing her head.

Emilia: “I’m sorry I caused you trouble— Everyone, I love you all.”

Arc 4 Chapter 91 - False Sleep

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 13, Chapter 3 “Straight Bet”, Part 4 (greatly abridged)

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

Listening to Emilia’s tearful wish, Subaru felt his entire body stabbed by pangs of remorse. The guilt of digging up her painful memories to the point that he made her cry tormented his heart to no end.

From Emilia’s faltering words, he could sense the love and gratitude she felt for the people she had lived with in Elixir Forest. Yet, it all changed on the day the snow first fell, when her fond memories were replaced by their voices, filled with hatred and malice.

Subaru couldn’t possibly know what they really thought, trapped inside the ice. But regardless, Emilia’s days of warmth and happiness had been sealed along with them inside that thick, never-melting ice.

Subaru: “...But why did they say those things to you? From what you just told me... it’d only make sense if the one who froze the forest in ice was... you. But, were you really powerful enough to do something that incredible when you were that little?”

Emilia: “—I don’t know. Back then, I knew far less of the world than I do now. I knew nothing of what I could or couldn’t do, and I was always taking advantage of everyone’s kindness. But... without Puck, I doubt I have the power to freeze an entire forest by myself, even now.”

Subaru: “But if you had Puck... could you do it?”

Emilia: “———”

At Subaru’s question, Emilia wordlessly nodded. Her half-hearted affirmation was probably because she was afraid Subaru would mistake her for the culprit who had frozen the forest. But that wasn’t what Subaru was thinking at all.

Not because he was biased, but because of a simple matter of sequence.

Subaru: “You don’t have to look so worried, I’m not gonna misunderstand. You met Puck way after the Forest had already been frozen... almost a hundred years before that, right? You and the ice and Puck are backwards in the sequence.”

Emilia: “Mmm... Yes, but...”

Sensing her unease, Subaru gave her his conclusion. Receiving this, Emilia nodded, though her expression was too tense to be called relieved. Resisting the urge to furrow his brows at her reaction, Subaru strained himself to keep his expression composed in front of her as he folded his arms.

—He had a vague feeling that something was off even while he was listening to Emilia’s story. But it was here, in this instant, that he felt this sense of incongruity more intensely than ever.

It’s only natural. Natsuki Subaru had never trespassed into Emilia’s past or inner thoughts before, and had been content to love her while coddling her superficial traits like a princess.

And so, this is Subaru’s Trial— one essential for him to undergo.

Now that Subaru had lost his qualification to challenge the Trials of the Tomb, this will be the Trial that will determine whether he has the right to stand before Emilia, and to support her at her side.

Subaru: “I understand what kind of scene you saw in the Trial now... So, if we flip this around, what do you think you’ll have to do to beat it?”

Emilia: “That’s... Um, it’s...”

Emilia’s gaze wandered. Not because she was hesitating whether to answer, but because it was so vague that she was struggling to find the words.

Emilia had no clear insights about how to break through the Trial. On her very first attempt, she was abruptly presented with a long-held quandary, and now she was being asked to give a perfect answer.

But, the First Trial only requires the challenger to give an answer to the past they’ve been avoiding— Do this, and they will pass the Trial, that’s what Echidna had told him.

Affirm it, or deny it, either would suffice as an answer.

Emilia had already accepted the sad memory of being rejected by all those who had been kind to her. So, does that mean she'd have to get over it in order to pass the Trial?

To get over something you've left behind in your past— how does one do such a thing?

Subaru had no clear answers to give her. But, having overcome the First Trial and experienced the Second, Subaru did know some things. Just through the few interactions he'd had with that character named Echidna, he did know this.

—Chances are, the Trial would not present its challenger with an impossible problem.

That's only natural, considering its creator, Echidna's, goals. What Echidna desires are the results to sate her curiosity, a treasure which shines the brightest when attained as a Trial is overcome. At least, that should be what that Witch is thinking.

In this case, the result would be whether the challenger affirms or denies their past. In other words, Emilia should already have everything she needs to pass the Trial. If she could just figure out what the conditions are and give her reply, that would be her solution. So then, the obstacle here isn't the Trial itself, but—

Subaru: "If you keep challenging without having an answer... it's always going to turn out the same way."

Emilia: "—So, what do you think, Subaru?"

Subaru: "..."

Emilia: "Having heard my story... about my Trial and my past... What do you think? Do you have any ideas on how to beat it? I'm still wondering what I should do..."

Last night after her Trial, Emilia must've spent the whole night asking herself this question instead of sleeping. It must've been like this, trapped in this vortex of soul-abrading thoughts, that she passed out in the end.

Subaru: "Emilia... Earlier you said that you wanted to melt the ice and thank everyone..."

Emilia: “Mm.”

Subaru: “But why do you feel this way?”

Emilia had been cruelly treated by those people who were closest to her.

So for what reason would she want to save those men and women, trapped beneath the ice?

Subaru: “Your last memories of them were how they cursed and rejected you, right? After those cruel and hateful things they said to you... why do you still want to help them?”

Emilia: “—Subaru... If I directed a bunch of awful things towards you right now, would you no longer want to help me?”

Subaru: “———”

Subaru was speechless.

Emilia’s amethyst eyes were gazing at Subaru, full of sincerity, and the indecisive weakness in her pupils had vanished as she answered.

Emilia: “Yes, my last memories of everyone are painful... But just because that was what happened at the end, that doesn’t invalidate all the time we’ve spent together. We’ve shared many good memories, too.”

Subaru: “...”

Emilia: “I don’t want to forget those, while only remembering how they hurt me... I want to save everyone so we can laugh and smile together again... I know it’s greedy of me, but that’s how I feel...”

Saying this, Emilia held her hands to her lips as she peeked at Subaru’s reaction. She looked as though she had just accidentally voiced some ugly part of herself and was afraid of being despised for it.

Perceiving Emilia’s unease, Subaru thought to himself,

—She’s just the kind of person who couldn’t go without finding that wish greedy, huh.

Emilia: “—Subaru?”

Subaru: “Nothing, I was just thinking... that you are completely right.”

Even if they only wanted to hurt her in the end, that didn’t mean all the bonds and memories they’ve shared had disappeared.

Rem and Ram had both killed Subaru in the past, but that didn’t stop him from striving his best to save them, and it was those same feelings that had kept him going during those loops starting from the Capital.

What Emilia felt was just what Subaru himself had felt— that’s all.

Subaru: “———”

But just when he felt this sense of relief, Subaru noticed the greatest incongruity yet. Just how could he have overlooked such an astoundingly obvious discrepancy?

Emilia: “—Subaru?”

Seeing Subaru staring at her with his face frozen stiff, Emilia’s eyes wavered with confusion. Yet, despite realizing that he was worrying her, Subaru still couldn’t pull himself together. Because,

—Inside Emilia’s heart, she had already reached her answer to her past.

Subaru: “———”

Deep in Great Forest of Elinor, the elven tribe she had once spent her days together with are presently sleeping, frozen in ice. In the past she remembered, on the day the forest was buried by snow, Emilia had endured all the malice of the people she had trusted, and yet, she proclaimed without hesitation that she wanted to save them, and thank them.

That is the decisive answer to the past she had tried to avoid.

If Subaru’s resolve to admit his stupidity and say goodbye to his parents in his past met the conditions for passing the First Trial, then Emilia’s determination here should be deemed just as worthy. And yet, the Trial refused to recognize that she had fulfilled its conditions.

Perhaps, it was because Subaru had woken her and interrupted the Trial. But even in the previous loops after the first night, when Subaru wasn’t there to wake her, never once had she passed the Trial.

Was Emilia's answer just not suited for the Trial that was given to her?

Subaru: "But, that's..."

If Echidna is the one ruling on the Trials, could the answer's worth simply depend on the Witch's mood at the time? Yet, Echidna herself had declared that it doesn't matter what answer she is given, but merely that she receives an answer.

It's unlike her to reject an answer given by a challenger. Yet, assuming that's true— it did occur to Subaru that maybe, for whatever reason, she was rejecting Emilia's answer, and only hers. It tormented his heart to consider it.

Because to consider it would be to recognize the possibility that only Emilia was completely unable to ever break through the Trials.

Subaru: "As if I could just accept that... I'm begging you, Echidna..."

Emilia: "Subaru, what's wrong? Did I say something strange again...?"

Subaru: "No... it's not you, Emilia. If anything, it's a problem with the examiner... Now, you said you wanted to melt the ice and save everyone, but... were you not able to? Before Roswaal brought you outside, you and Puck were living inside the forest, right? There must've been plenty of time to try..."

Although he knew it was a cruel question, Subaru still asked it.

Being that he's heard Emilia's past, then attempting such a thing and unsealing them from the ice would mean the freed people would again shower Emilia in curses. Emilia herself must've agonized about this exact thing many times over. Her nails dug into her arms as she cast down her eyes,

Emilia: "I've tried with Puck many times, but... I couldn't melt the ice."

Subaru: "When you say you couldn't melt it... do you mean mentally couldn't or... physically couldn't...?"

Even if it was a mental reason, Subaru had no intention of blaming her. It's not easy to do something that you know for a fact will hurt you, that's the same for anyone.

However, at Subaru's question, Emilia weakly replied.

Emilia: “Physically... I think. That ice is special... It wouldn’t melt no matter what we tried from the outside. Maybe only the one who cast the spell could reverse it, or we’ll need something even more powerful... That’s why I accepted Roswaal’s proposal and...”

Subaru: “Proposal...?”

Emilia: “Ah...”

Seeing Subaru’s brows furrow, Emilia covered her mouth as if she had just said something she shouldn’t have. However, faced with Subaru’s silent gaze, Emilia’s shoulders immediately dropped,

Emilia: “Roswaal, we... made an agreement.”

Subaru: “———”

Emilia: “He came with an insignia, asked me to hold it... And once he saw the gem glow red, he told me about the Royal Selection... and he said...”

Perhaps, the fact that he’d find Emilia in the forest and that the emblem would glow when she held it were also written in the Gospel. In his mental picture, Subaru could almost see Roswaal’s strange smile as he reached out towards Emilia and proclaimed,

Emilia: “—«If you can ascend to the throne, then surely, your wish to melt the ice in this forest can also be fulfilled».”

Subaru: “...And you believed him?”

Emilia: “I was pretty desperate, I guess. He didn’t tell me the details of how to melt the ice, but... I accepted his offer, and left the forest with Roswaal. Puck... He didn’t object, but just came with me without saying anything.”

Subaru: “So that’s why you decided to participate in the Royal Selection... Before, when you said you had a selfish reason... that’s what you meant?”

Emilia once said that, unlike the other candidates, she was participating in the Royal Selection for a very selfish reason. Subaru had avoided prying into the details thus far, but now everything was finally coming together.

Emilia: "...You must think I'm terrible, right?"

While Subaru pieced this together in his mind, Emilia quietly murmured.

When he looked up, he saw Emilia timidly watching him with her lips quivering.

Emilia: "The others... Everyone has amazing goals and resolve as their reason for competing in the Royal Selection, but mine's just a reeaally personal problem."

Subaru: "But I think wanting to help everyone in that village is really amazing as well. The number of people you are helping doesn't diminish just how great your cause is... And you weren't lying when you said what you said in the Royal Selection Hall, right?"

Emilia: "What I said in the Royal Selection Hall..."

Subaru: "That you want to see everyone treated as equals... I don't think those words were a lie."

At first, maybe she was just seeking some resolution to circumstances which were beyond her control. But, as Emilia learned of the outside world and the scale of a hundred years' worth of time, surely, she would have had a chance to think.

Subaru didn't feel that the words she spoke at the Royal Selection Hall were just insincere, superficial varnish. If those were her genuine thoughts, and her reasons for wanting to win the Royal Selection remain the same even now, Subaru would have no reason to look down on her.

Subaru: "So it's alright, you don't have to look so worried. I'm on your side and you can rely on me, that hasn't changed since last night. Even if you say you are okay, and refuse leaning on my shoulder."

Emilia: "Ah... Um, about last night..."

Subaru: "Don't, I'll feel horrible if you apologize. But well, what I can tell you is that I'm always gonna be right where you can lean on me, Emilia-tan. Even though I'm happy to see you stand on your own, it's fine to be a little weak once in a while as well."

Thumping his hand to his chest, Subaru relaxed his lips, and saw Emilia let out a relieved sigh. Then instantly, as if being overtaken by that relief, her upper body began swaying,

Emilia: “Now that I feel relieved... Suddenly, I...”

Subaru: “That’s because you just had a terrible dream and didn’t get much sleep. Don’t push yourself, it’s alright to take a little nap. I won’t do anything, just stay here and watch over you.”

Emilia: “That part about «won’t do anything» reeaally bothers me though...”

While somewhat minding by that unnecessary statement that had been appended, Emilia’s silver hair went on swaying as she fought the temptation to sleep. Subaru placed his fingers on her forehead, and gently pushed her slender body down.

Emilia: “Aah...”

Subaru: “Don’t worry, just get to sleep.”

Without leaving any room for debate, he laid her down on the bed. Drawing the sheets over her delicate figure, Subaru pulled the chair closer to the bed and sat himself down where he could better observe Emilia’s face as she slept.

Subaru: “You’ve been talking non-stop, and your head must be exhausted, so if what I said could relax you a little... then get some nice rest. Because we’ll need you to do your best again tonight.”

Emilia: “...Is it really alright to spoil me like this?”

Subaru: “Of course it is. Just keep getting more and more spoiled. I’ll pamper you till you are so spoiled that you are all rotten inside.”

Seeing Subaru give her a shrug, Emilia quietly laughed as she lay on the bed. Then, still keeping her gaze on Subaru, Emilia slowly reached out her arm from under the sheets,

Emilia: “—hand.”

Subaru: “Hm?”

Emilia: “If you are going to spoil me, will you... hold my hand? Just until I fall asleep, please?”

Subaru: “Hoho, leave it to me.”

Subaru took her small, delicate hand, smiling as he savored the luxurious smoothness of her palm. Emilia smiled in return as she followed Subaru's advice and softly closed her eyes.

It didn't take long before she exhaled a quiet breath of sleep.

Subaru: "...I hope you can have some good dreams, for just a little while."

Watching Emilia as she lay quietly in bed, Subaru gently brushed aside the few strands of silver hair on her forehead and dropped his eyes to the hand still holding his.

If feeling someone else's existence like this could free her from the loneliness of her dreams, then he'd be glad. Because to be left alone in this room, endlessly tormented by nightmares, would be far too cruel for her.

Subaru: "Well, anyway... Sure learned a lot today."

Sitting there, holding her hand, Subaru straightened his back as he chewed over the details of their conversation.

Emilia's past, and her reason for competing in the Royal Selection. Roswaal's proposal as he brought her outside, and why Emilia had no choice but to accept it.

And most importantly, Emilia's Trial, and its true motives for rejecting her even though she should have already reached her answer— Leaving those loose ends untied, and having put Emilia to sleep, here he was.

Subaru: "——"

Quietly, he gazed at Emilia as she slept.

It might've been that it pained him to see her so frail, and so he decided to postpone it for now— But that was not the reason. Subaru put off getting those essential answers and practically forced her to go to sleep with a purpose.

Something that would've been impossible to do, if Emilia was still awake.

Subaru: "But, all things considered... this is all I can think of."

Over the past loops, the details that tugged at him and other circumstantial evidence all forced him to consider this possibility. But there was only one way to be sure, and it can be easily done now.

And, if he is right, it would definitely be the light to break through this darkness---

He breathed in, and held his breath.

While listening to the thumping of his own heart and the rushing of his blood, Subaru reached out to confirm it. His left hand, not the right which clutches Emilia's, reaches towards the center of her slender, pale neck while she soundly slept, and,

Subaru: "You aren't really sleeping, are you?"

He felt its cold, hard touch at his fingertips. Straining his voice as he said these words, they nevertheless came out.

A few moments passed in silence, and just when Subaru's heart began to blaze with burning impatience--- suddenly,

???: *"Ah, so you've noticed--- I'm so glad, Subaru."*

From inside the green crystal at his fingertips, the androgynous voice of a Spirit echoed directly within Subaru's skull.

Arc 4 Chapter 92 - Lie

Has been cut from the Light Novel Adaptation

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#)

Puck: “Feels like it’s been ages since we talked like this.”

Subaru: “Well it has been... Right, nearly two weeks since you’ve gone missing. Your owner’s been worried sick looking all over for you, and you were nowhere to be found.”

It was a strange sensation, hearing the words steep directly into his skull instead of vibrating through the air¹⁵¹. Nevertheless, listening to Puck’s voice, still as carefree as ever, Subaru was struggling to keep his inner rage from seeping into his reply.

More infuriated than elated to get his expected—or rather, hoped-for reaction, it was too much for Subaru to take lying down.

Puck: “It seems, over the two weeks we haven’t talked... you’ve built up quite a bit of resentment towards me.”

Subaru: “You know why that is, yeah? Don’t make me spell it out for you.”

Puck: “Right. The things I said in front of the blue-haired girl before I stopped coming out... Now that I think about it, it was pretty thoughtless of me. I really did reflect on it.”

Subaru: “...! That’s not what we are talking about!”

¹⁵¹ Throughout this whole conversation, Puck and Subaru are talking telepathically (one of Puck’s abilities). This also happens earlier on in the story, just before Julius is first introduced; however, it was cut from the anime, remaining in both the Light Novel and Web Novel formats. You might have noticed by now, but lines in italics start for “mental”, or you could say unspoken, lines.

What was thoughtless was digging up something Subaru had already forgotten he was angry about. And to top it off, it completely derailed the conversation from what they ought to be discussing.

“Don’t get so angry...”, Puck pouted at Subaru’s outburst,

Puck: “I know that. I just wanted to apologize. If we don’t clear up some of the bad blood between us before moving onto the main topic, we wouldn’t be having a real heart-to-heart, now would we...? Especially now that I’m in a position where there is so much I’ll need to ask of you.”

Subaru: “Okay, you good? If you are done stroking your self-satisfaction, let’s get on with the conversation. You know, the one you want to have, about the main topic.”

Acknowledging Puck’s apology with some perfunctory acceptance, Subaru glared at the crystal as he pushed the conversation forward. Reflecting Subaru’s gaze in its translucent gleam, the stone at Emilia’s chest was glowing with a dark-green luminescence.

Subaru clicked his tongue, and,

Subaru: “Anyway, this isn’t a good place to talk. For now, let’s go outside. We don’t know when Emilia’ll wake up. Better change locations befor...”

Puck: “I am sorry, but I can’t— And that would count as a part of our main topic as well.”

While gazing at the sleeping Emilia, Subaru heard his proposal shot down by Puck’s telepathic words. For a moment, Subaru made an expression as if his nose had been pinched,

Subaru: “That wasn’t a «don’t wanna» kind of rejection... You can’t? What’s that supposed to mean?”

Puck: “Only what it sounds like. In my present state, going outside the crystal... Or rather, manifesting in the external world is currently impossible for me. If it weren’t, did you really think I would ever let Lia feel this sad and alone?”

Subaru: “———”

Hearing Puck say this as if were a matter of course, Subaru’s mind fell into silence.

The fact is, considering everything that's happened between Subaru and this Spirit up to now, Subaru honestly felt like doubting the credibility of Puck's words.

But aside from Puck's tendency to always show up late when it actually matters, fundamentally— he exists solely for Emilia's sake, and his feelings for Emilia are genuine. Subaru considered these points to be beyond any doubt. Which means,

Subaru: "Some circumstance, or some reason... is preventing you from coming outside?"

Puck: "That's right. I haven't even been able to reach out through thoughts like this. So it was very fortunate that you suspected this and called to me in the crystal. I doubt anyone else could have secured such an opportunity."

Subaru: "Anyone else...?"

Puck: "It's very simple, the only one who could be this close to Lia while she's unconscious would be you. Besides, even if by chance someone did touch the crystal, there was the problem of whether our affinity would allow us to communicate through thoughts. But we've done this before, so I knew I could speak to you this way."

Subaru: "...Now that you mention it, we have, haven't we? So, what is it you want from me?"

Puck: "Hm...?"

Subaru: "Now that someone has finally met these preconditions and, by some divine chance, called out to you... You must've been prepared to not let this million-to-one chance slip away. So, with the short time that we have, what do you have to tell me?"

Puck: "———"

Subaru's words were met with a meaningful silence. In his mind, he could almost imagine the unseen cat Spirit smiling a wide and humanlike grin. Without betraying Subaru's imaginings, Puck laughed, his voice unable to conceal his delight.

Puck: "So I was right to expect great things from you after all... Though it pains me to think that I would have to entrust Lia to someone other than myself."

Subaru: "...I can pass on what you are thinking to Emilia, if you want."

The latter part of Puck's joyful words became laced with gloom. Sensing this change about him, Subaru lowered his eyes. His suggestion had been no more than a reassuring thought. But that being said, it might actually be a good idea.

After losing Puck, who had been holding up the core of her heart, Emilia was in a perilous state. She was enduring it for now, but as the passage of time and her repeated failures in the Trial abrade away her body and mind, her weakness will begin to show through. If that's how it will turn out, then maybe offering her some relief here would—

Puck: "Better not. If she learns that I've been talking to someone behind her back, in the worst case, Lia's mind could break."

But, before Subaru could go any further with that thought, he was stopped by Puck's dejected voice. Trying to take in the meaning of those words, Subaru expelled a dry sigh in the physical world,

Subaru: "And... what's that supposed to mean?"

Puck: "It means exactly what it sounds like. If you act as an intermediary and convey my words to Lia, she will find out that I am not truly asleep inside the crystal. If she realizes that, despite preventing me from manifesting and from contacting anyone, I am not actually silenced, it would likely cause her precarious mental balance to collapse."

Subaru: "Wa—wait a minute—!"

Subaru shook his head, calling for Puck's piling words to stop.

Since he had no body, with only the crystal's sheen for Subaru to look on, Puck's expression was imperceptible. But, at least from Puck's voice, Subaru judged that this was no attempt at deception.

Subaru: "Do you... realize what you are saying? Just now... it's like you were saying that it's Emilia herself who's preventing you from coming outside..."

Puck: "..."

Subaru: "And silence you...? What are you talking about? Emilia's been calling out for you, wailing and in tears, asking for your help... So how can you...! It wasn't mine, it wasn't anyone else's, it was your name that she was calling when she was exhausted and about to crumble! So why are you...!"

Puck: "...Ah, that's right. You would be the first person to be upset to hear Lia call someone else's name before yours, Subaru."

Subaru: "——Tch!!"

Those words were utterly beside the point, but realizing how they accurately captured the core of his thoughts, Subaru's throat clamped shut with an incomprehensible and violent emotion.

It was in hopes of becoming the foremost in Emilia's heart that he had toiled and struggled thus far. And the fact that he didn't hold that place in her heart bothered him to no end. That was the truth.

At the same time, it drove him mad with rage to see that the one who did occupy that spot in Emilia's heart, despite possessing far more power than Subaru and professing to hold Emilia above all the world, was failing to take any action for her sake.

And so, when he was told that it was not him, not Puck, but Emilia herself who was responsible for that fact, how could he possibly just accept it?

Subaru: "So, what... You mean to say that every time Emilia is broken by the Trials, worn down by loneliness, smiling in tears reminiscing on her painful past, every bit of that is just a performance and a lie? —You expect me to believe that!?"

If those tears, those cries, and those laments had all been an act to deceive the people around her, then Emilia must certainly be some gifted actress. Rather than aiming for the throne, she should be aiming for an Oscar instead.

If one could ignore the obvious fact that Emilia had neither the talent nor reason to deceive Subaru and the others, that is.

Subaru: "There's no way... Never mind constantly fooling everyone around her, she gets crushed by guilt just over telling the tiniest lie. That's the kind of girl Emilia is..."

Puck: "Subaru, calm down. I'm not speaking ill of Emilia like in your worst-case thoughts. So just calm down."

Subaru: "Worst-case thoughts...? What worst-case thoughts... You bastard, stop peeking into my head! That's got nothing to do with this...! No matter what happens, I'll never think of Emilia like..."

Puck: "—NATSUKI SUBARU!"

Puck's penetrating voice struck through the roiled and agitated Subaru.

The intense emotion packed within that brief call was enough to, for a moment, freeze Subaru's trembling body still. Yet at the end of Subaru's timid gaze was not the figure of the small cat, but the stone quietly resting on Emilia's chest, glowing with its inorganic light.

Puck: "...Have you calmed down?"

Subaru: "...So you can raise your voice after all... I always thought you are just a carefree fluffy furball who never gives a damn about the seriousness of the situation."

Puck: "It is very rare for me to shout like this. It's only when it's Lia... or when I need to scold some disobedient brat, that I raise my voice this way."

Subaru: "Disobedient brat, huh."

At that unforgiving description, Subaru spilled a small sigh.

He couldn't deny it. He could see that his unsightly attitude was problematic here.

How many times since the start of this long-awaited conversation had Subaru failed to remain calm? And how many times did Puck have to rebuke him to get the conversation back on track?

It's pathetic how he couldn't restrain himself. And that heart of steel he had so yearned for, was there not even a scrap of it inside him?

Puck: "But, to be honest, I am glad there is someone who can get so emotional over Lia this way. You must be providing Lia with no small amount of strength as well."

Subaru: “—Huh?”

Puck: “No one has managed to step this far into Lia’s heart before. Not even Roswaal, who brought Lia out of the forest for the Royal Selection, has ever touched the deepest core of her thoughts. But, since that man only intends to place Lia on the throne as a means to another end, that is not so surprising.”

Subaru: “—Do you... know what Roswaal’s goals are?”

Puck: “To follow the Gospel, right? Perhaps he’s a lot like Betty in that respect. Though, one has a lot written in his, while the other has nothing written in hers. Similar yet different, might be a better way to put it.”

It seems Puck already knew the details about Roswaal and Beatrice’s circumstances. Subaru doubted that the information would have been passed to Emilia, and that only made him even more unsettled about Puck’s reasons for keeping those facts to himself. But Subaru could already imagine what Puck would say if he had asked him about it.

Subaru: “Since it’s unrelated to Emilia, you were in no hurry to do anything... Huh.”

Puck: “If you mean Betty, I would have liked to do everything I could for her. But... now that Lia is tangled up with Roswaal, I have no choice but to focus on that.”

Subaru: “Well that’s your own damn fault for not saying anything when you knew what was going to happen, isn’t it?”

Puck: “I have nothing to say to that. Though I do think it’s unfair of me to make you deal with the consequences.”

Regardless of intention, it seems his refusal to prioritize anything besides Emilia was the primary reason behind all this. If his inaction was what brought about Emilia’s present hardships, then that would be far too great a blunder to be laughed off as a simple mistake.

Subaru: “I’ll be wrecking Roswaal’s plans so let’s disregard that for now. And Beatrice... I have no intention of leaving her to you. The only thing I’m conspiring with you about is Emilia.”

Puck: "That's fine. Right now, I don't have the strength to spend on anyone besides Lia. Expending my efforts on anything other than what is dearest to me would be going about it backwards."

Subaru: "Then tell me. What do you mean Emilia is preventing you from coming outside? I won't believe for a second that she's been lying to everyone."

Last time, he had been running off his emotions, but those thoughts remain the same even now. Although there was no way he could possibly know everything inside Emilia's heart, she was certainly not the kind of person who would deceive those around her and discard their thoughtfulness like this.

Hearing this thought, Puck transmitted what felt like a relieved sigh into Subaru's mind.

Puck: "I'm not in a position to say anything like «you needn't worry». But while it is by Lia's will that I am prevented from going outside... it isn't because Lia herself is trying to keep me from doing so."

Subaru: "...Sorry, I don't understand what you are saying."

Puck: "It's hard to explain. Lia seeking my help, calling to the crystal, and being unable to hear my voice, all of it is real. The fact that she is scared to be alone and trembling without her support is also true. But..."

Subaru: "-----"

Puck: "Lia's subconscious is refusing to let me materialize or communicate with her. The front and back-ends of her heart are at odds... might be a way to describe it."

The front and back ends of her heart. Subaru gulped down a breath at those words. Surely, he couldn't be talking about split personalities? That said, every time crisis has borne down on Subaru in this world, it came along with multiple experiences of his own thoughts betraying him.

If this was the same with Emilia, then,

Subaru: "You can't influence Emilia from your end?"

Puck: "It's tricky. The back-end's persistence is far stronger than the front end. And even if I do manage to get through to the front, it will only spell trouble for Lia's mind."

Subaru: "What makes you think it'll be trouble? Like, would something upset her if you were to come out..."

Puck: "But you already know the answer, don't you?"

Interrupting Subaru's trailing question, there was almost a hint of ridicule in Puck's voice. Receiving this thought, Subaru fell into a momentary silence before lowering his eyes,

Subaru: "—It's just a guess."

Puck: "Hm, go on. Let's hear it. I did say this, didn't I? I'm expecting great things from you, Subaru."

At Subaru's mutter, Puck gave this entirely ungratifying stamp of approval. Feeling his mood lighten somewhat even from that meagre assurance, Subaru continued,

Subaru: "If you are present, then Emilia..."

Puck: "Mhm, mhm?"

Subaru: "...Will have to accept some inconvenient part of her past— That's why Emilia's subconsciously stopping you from interfering."

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Puck: "———"

Receiving Subaru's thought-waves, Puck's reaction was neither rejection nor laughter, but silence.

If that unseen cat Spirit was here in form, he'd probably be floating there with his leisurely air and carefree expression, swaying his long tail back and forth.

Puck: "Amazing, Subaru. That's a better answer than I expected."

Puck said after a moment of silence with an impressed tone in his voice. At this, Subaru exhaled a sigh through his nostrils.

Subaru: "Seriously, your compliments don't make me happy at all, you know."

Puck: "It's honest praise. You didn't have much information to go on, so the fact that you've deduced this far really is surprising. You know Lia's heart well."

Saying so with an air of deep compassion, Puck's consciousness was probably watching the sleeping Emilia. As if lured by that voice, Subaru turned his gaze to her pale, sleeping face as well. Lying there, sound asleep, it was impossible to tell whether she was having a good dream or a nightmare.

The Trial and its accompanying past whittling at her heart— Subaru had his doubts about the accuracy of the recreated compared was to the past that actually took place.

The past that Subaru saw in his Trial was about him parting with his parents, who were the symbols of his past regrets. It was only natural. The past Subaru needed to overcome was not a single great event, but the environment in which he had languished during that time he had spent in sloth. And so, for Subaru, the Trial created a time and space that never truly existed, and gave him a pleasant reprieve to be with his parents while urging him to make his farewells.

Subaru: "Those pasts aren't necessarily faithful to what happened in the real world. They are just mental images drawn from the challenger's mind assembled into a form suited for the Trials."

At the end of the Trial, Echidna had told Subaru the rough outlines of how the Trial worked. Having collected pieces of memories that even Subaru didn't know he remembered, the Trial had used them to craft an elaborately fabricated world.

In other words, none of Subaru's parting from his parents was real, and it had been no more than self-satisfaction.

—"But so what?", were Subaru's present thoughts.

Subaru: "The past you see in the Tomb is a forgery disguised as the real thing. And the asshole who set up the Trials did it so that the challenger will reach whatever answer satisfies her the most."

Echidna hadn't stated as much, but from what he had seen of that Witch's deviousness first-hand, Subaru was sure it was just the kind of thing she would do. And so,

Subaru: "The past that Emilia saw would be part reality and part fabrication. And you... must know something that would be decisive in correcting that discrepancy. That's why Emilia's subconscious is blocking her attempts to summon you."

Puck: "...Which begs the question. If I'm with her, Lia would see the past as it really was. So why would Lia's heart reject me, knowing this?"

Subaru: "That's s..."

"Simple", Subaru was about to say when he hesitated.

The reason for his hesitation was just as basic. If the next words came out of his mouth, it would mean exposing the reality of Emilia's past— as well as the fact that the cruel and aversive scene she had described was only a cover for the truth buried in her heart.

Puck: "...Because the truth that Lia has forgotten is far more unforgiving than the false memories she had spoken of."

Puck finished Subaru's sentence for him. Recognizing what he had failed to recognize until the words came out, Subaru's face twisted in grief as he looked towards Emilia.

The warm, friendly times she spent with the elves— to have those same people turn on her with all their hate and malice, showering her with their spite inside the ice as she bade her long, long farewell. That past which tore at Subaru's body and soul just thinking about was, in fact, a gentle cradle to shield her from an even crueler truth.

Subaru: "Do you... know what Emilia actually saw?"

Puck: "...Unfortunately, I don't. When I first met Lia, it was already after she had been frozen alongside the forest. So I don't know why Lia would be afraid of my presence. And I have no idea how I play into Lia's past."

Listening to Puck's mutters of genuine regret, Subaru bit down on his lip.

Emilia's real past was the reason she couldn't pass the Trial. Grasping this, he was now one step closer to the answer.

Each time Emilia was inside the Trial, she saw both her real and her fabricated past. And she herself wanted that fabricated past to be her real one. As long as she fails to find an answer to her actual past, she will not pass the Trial. And so long as Emilia continues lying to her own heart, those sweet knives of her past would continue shredding away at her mind.

Subaru: "What should I do?"

Puck: "I don't know."

Subaru: "I want to help Emilia... and become her strength."

Puck: "It is the same for me. I exist only for her sake. If I cannot be her strength, then there is no reason for me to exist."

Subaru: "I want to support her in everything she wishes to do... and I want to be at her side."

Puck: "———"

Faced with Subaru's appeals, Puck fell silent as he sank into thought. All the while, Subaru intently waited for the Spirit's reply. Then, with a voice laced with determination,

Puck: "Subaru—— There is only one possibility."

Subaru: "Possibility...?"

Puck: "It is a solution that would've been absolutely unthinkable if I were on my own, and, even now, I am strongly averse to it. This is something I never imagined I would suggest, even if I did consider it."

Listening to Puck's consternation, Subaru braced himself for the words to come. At least, this was the first time Subaru had heard Puck speak in a voice this serious in his normal form.

Subaru: "What do you need me to do?"

Puck: "It is something that I will have to do. Though you will be the one left with all the cleanup afterwards."

Subaru: "...You sound like you are gonna say something insane next, I'm kinda scared."

Puck: "I never thought I'd end up leaving it all in someone else's hands, either. But, well... I believe you are the only person who'd be willing to stake your life for Lia's sake, if need be."

Sensing that Puck was repressing some great emotion as he spoke, Subaru sucked in a small breath.

No doubt— Puck's assessment was correct. For Emilia, Natsuki Subaru would gladly lay down his life.

Seeing Subaru give his silent assent, Puck must've nodded inside the crystal as well. And then, in a quiet voice,

Puck: "Tomorrow morning, I will break my Contract with Lia— And once the relationship between Lia and me is severed, I'm sure that when she cries, you will do what you can to comfort her."

Arc 4 Chapter 93 - Mutual Proposals

Has been cut from the Light Novel Adaptation

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Complete](#)

Puck: “Once the Contract between me and Lia is terminated, can I trust you to take care of everything that comes after?”

Subaru: “...That’ll depend on what your reasons are.”

Licking his lips, Subaru held back his urge to challenge those words as he looked at Puck straight on. Inside the crystal, Puck’s expression remained indiscernible. But, from the vortex of emotions in his voice, Subaru could tell that he did not say this lightly.

But they are talking about Contracts here. What’s more, it’s a Contract between a Spirit and a Spiritual Arts User, which are to be valued above all else. To speak of one-sidedly breaking such a Contract—Subaru couldn’t possibly fathom what he might be thinking.

Subaru: “The Contract between you and Emilia... Simply put, it’s an agreement between a Spirit and its contractor, right? Breaking it would come with its corresponding penalty, wouldn’t it?”

Puck: “Yes, naturally.”

Subaru: “If I’m imagining this correctly, the contractor abides by the Contract in exchange for the power they borrow from the Spirit... And without a Contract, there would be no pretext for the Spirit to lend its power to the contractor... So breaking your Contract would...”

Puck: “Essentially, the link between Lia and myself would be severed.”

Without denying or amending Subaru’s speculations, Puck merely affirmed his thoughts.

Yet, that affirmation would mean—

Subaru: "Without being able to draw from your power... Emilia won't be able to fight at all. Left alone, she'll just be no different than an ordinary girl."

Puck: "That shouldn't worry you too much, should it? Whether Lia has the strength for it or not, you are the one who doesn't want her to fight. Though I can't say the same for what Lia herself will think."

Subaru: "Guh... You are... not wrong about that. But my feelings aren't the problem here. And all this talk about fighting strength isn't the point either. What's important right now... is what'll happen to Emilia without you by her side."

For Emilia, losing Puck would be the same as losing the supporting beam of her heart. If what Puck has said so far is truth, then the deep parts of Emilia's heart have noticed that Puck isn't actually sleeping. The delicate bond between them has not been severed.

Yet, even with their bond still barely intact, Emilia was cornered and faltering to the point that she was relying entirely on Subaru, pleading for him not to leave her. But if her bond with Puck was truly severed—

Subaru: "I wouldn't be surprised if that shattered Emilia's mental stability on the spot... That has to be one of the last things you want to see. So just what are you plotting..."

Puck: "I'm not plotting anything. I would only be supporting Lia in a way that would be best for her. I will not, and cannot, do anything that child doesn't want me to."

Subaru: "And... Emilia wants you to terminate the Contract?"

Puck: "No, Subaru. Losing her Contract with me is only the byproduct of what Lia desires. What Lia presently desires is to pass the Trials of the Tomb. You can rest assured, there is no doubt about that."

Subaru never doubted it, either.

According to Puck's hypothesis— the reason why Emilia was unable to face her past was that she was repeatedly stumbling on the fabricated past in her Trials. However, she definitely isn't the kind of person who would merely pretend to overcome her past. Of that, Subaru was confident.

That conviction within Subaru's mind was never conveyed to Puck through words. But, as if that thought had successfully reached him regardless, the tone of Puck's telepathic voice sank,

Puck: "When Lia finds out that I am gone, she will probably fall apart. Crying like a child, wailing, inconsolable and afraid."

Subaru: "-----"

Puck: "But that's for the best, I think. This state where the surface of her heart believes I am gone while the depths of her heart know that I am still here is unnatural. Once both the surface and the depths of her heart realize that I am gone... the shackles keeping her from her past will be undone, and, for the first time, Lia will be ready to face her own heart."

Puck's words were quiet, but packed with a multitude of emotions. There was compassion, grief, joy, and, above all, abounding willingness to sacrifice everything for the one he loved most.

Subaru: "So she must lose her bond with you... in order to face herself and move forward?"

Puck: "Yes, I believe so. I'm sure it will cause her much pain, but I know Lia is a girl who can persevere through them."

Subaru: "But you won't be there for her anymore. Aren't you worried? Don't you want to stay with her and protect that too-kind-for-her-own-good daughter of yours? Isn't that what you want?"

Subaru wasn't sure what he was saying anymore. If Puck's proposal could really deliver the results they desired, then it would be far better than anything Subaru could have hoped for. Just as Puck pointed out, Emilia's ability to fight is irrelevant, as Subaru already intends to do everything in his power to keep her as far away from the battlefield as possible.

So Subaru should, by all means, be welcoming Puck's proposal rather than trying to dissuade him.

Puck: "And here I thought you'd been pretty unhappy lately about me being at Lia's side?"

Subaru: "You aren't wrong about that... For all that's happened between us, my opinion of you is as low as it can get right now, and it's not gonna turn up any time soon. One decision to sacrifice yourself for Emilia isn't gonna wipe away all the bad impressions you've left behind, you know."

Puck: "That's quite a harsh thing to say... Makes me kind of sad."

Subaru: "But."

Their mutual impressions were already kind of set, so even if Subaru accepted everything Puck said, it still wouldn't change those negative impressions so easily. Subaru wasn't lying when he said that. However,

Subaru: "I can envision the sad look on Emilia's face after you are gone. And, as much as I hate it, I know better than anyone just how much you mean to Emilia. It's because you are... that I..."

Puck: "-----"

His words continued no further, but the indeterminate thought would not leave him. Puck preserved the mental silence as well, quietly waiting for Subaru's vague concepts to take shape. But, the more agitated he got, the less certain his answer became.

Subaru: "That I—I'm..."

Puck: "Your existence played a huge part in helping me come to this decision, Subaru."

Puck muttered before Subaru could finish his thought. Hearing that sound directly inside his skull, Subaru raised his head, staring stupidly at the glowing green crystal.

Puck: "Like you said, Lia means more to me than anything in this world. I would've wanted to always watch over her and provide her with strength at her side. But, even so, I still believe that the best thing I could do for her now is to leave her."

Subaru: "But, why is th..."

Puck: "Because you are here for her."

Subaru: "-----"

Suddenly, Subaru felt his breath stop.

Puck: "In this place... No, in this world, you and I are the only ones who would risk our lives for Lia. Through the time we've spent together, you have proved this. Lia, she... Other than I, you are the person she trusts the most. That is beyond doubt. You can be sure of it."

Subaru: "S—still... I don't have the kind of power that you do, and I can't blast away the obstacles in front of her with force. The best I can do is worry alongside her and listen to her talk about her troubles... That's all. Knowing that, you really want to leave me with everything after you are gone?"

Puck: "You seem to be misunderstanding something. I'm not saying that I want you to replace me. The things that only I can do are things that only I can do. The reverse is also true, and I expect that you will be helping Lia by doing the things that only you can do."

In front of the speechless Subaru, Puck piled on his words.

Closing off all escape, Puck wasted no time in forcing the decision on Subaru.

Puck: "Even without me, Lia will still be much stronger than you. No doubt, that would be the kind of strength you spoke of. But, as you know, that child is also weak. And this weakness I speak of certainly exists. What I want you to do is to support her because of that weakness."

Subaru: "...After you break the Contract and sever your bond with Emilia, what will happen to you?"

Puck: "The fact that I was able to materialize as I had been was owing to my connection with Lia. Once that connection is cut, I will need to stay constantly materialized so I may preserve my existence... But to remain materialized, I would endlessly drink the atmospheric Mana around me dry. If you saw my true form, it would probably shock you, Subaru."

This true form spoken of by Puck must be the towering figure that Subaru had to tilt back his head to see. The apex of four-legged beasts, that monster of raging blizzards. The Beast of the End.

Indeed, if he had to maintain that form indefinitely, there was simply no way it could be sustainable.

Subaru: "So then... Do you mean you'll be erased?"

Puck: "It is a little different from being erased. I will return to the small existence I once was before my Contract with Lia. It'd be someplace with a deep connection to me... most likely in the Great Elior

Forest. There, I will go to sleep inside something as my Anchor and wait for the time when I will be awakened again."

Subaru: "Awakened...?"

Puck: "By Lia, of course— This is where the Contract between me and that child ends. But if a time comes when she needs a new Contract and is in search of a Spirit to forge it with... I know she'll choose me again. That's what I believe."

Hearing a sense of cheerfulness in Puck's voice, Subaru swallowed his breath.

It was a decision which could mean he would disappear, but there was not a single trace of unease in Puck's tone. His personality had always been naturally optimistic, but, somehow, that didn't seem to be the reason for the lack of concern in his voice.

He did not have the slightest doubt that Emilia will choose him again.

Once her Contract with Puck is broken, Emilia will be forced to face her past. And he did not imagine for a second that Emilia might fail to fully accept that past. Only, after Emilia has overcome her past and is in need of another Contract, she will surely choose him again.

As far as Puck was concerned, that was definite. He never doubted Emilia's strength, nor did he doubt everything they'd shared in the time they spent together. And because of this, he was able to make the choice to sever his connection with her.

Subaru: "——"

For the always-wavering Subaru, it was a bond so strong and firm that it was dazzling.

Because it was Puck's deep love and trust in Emilia that has forged his heart of iron.

Subaru: "And you'll leave the task of comforting the heartbroken Emilia to me?"

And that was why Subaru's reply was so laced with desperation and resentment. Receiving those words, Puck softly cleared his throat, and, with a tone that was almost smiling,

Puck: "It pains my heart to do this, truly. But... since I'm entrusting my beloved daughter to you, it's my hope that you two can overcome it together."

Subaru: "...Can I take that as your implicit consent for me and Emilia-tan to be together?"

Puck: "If I annihilate you here and now, I'll have to rethink all sorts of things again."

Subaru: "Why do your comebacks always have to be that scary, you goddamn cat!!"

Blasting back at that extremely extreme reply, Subaru let slip the faintest glimpse of a smirk.

Puck's deep feelings for Emilia were immaculate, and the fact that they could have this back-and-forth despite their misgivings relaxed Subaru's mind, if only just a little.

And then, there was also something that Subaru thought of just now when he heard that severing Puck's Contract with Emilia would mean distancing him from this place. Supposing it could work— it would certainly tilt the odds of the bet in his favor.

Subaru: "I understand your plan now. Though I'm still a bit worried about whether it'll really go as planned... I'll put on some feigned ignorance and help you along with your ruse."

Puck: "I wonder what it feels like... to manipulate the girl you love."

Subaru: "I'm getting crushed by guilt here, so stop that. And besides, Emilia actually understands all sorts of things deep down... So when this is all over and done, she'll probably realize she's been tricked."

Puck: "If that happens, you and I will both be hated as fellow conspirators. You scared?"

Subaru: "Like hell! Compared to the «don't wash my laundry with daddy's dirty laundry» kind of angsty-teenage-girl hate, her hate towards me will be on a totally different level, you know."

If her resentment towards Puck could count as a familial issue, her resentment towards Subaru would be far more fatal. Although, she'd probably understand if Subaru explained it to her with complete sincerity. Yet, even if Emilia could understand the true motivations behind it, she still wouldn't be happy that her heart had been manipulated— Surely, he would not be forgiven for that.

Subaru: "But it's a bit late for that, huh— After all the unforgivable things I've done and all the times I've made her cry... how can I say I don't have the resolve to bear that guilt now?"

Puck: "———"

Subaru: "I'll accept your terms, Puck. I'll be cleaning up your mess for you. Tomorrow morning, when Emilia breaks down crying... She'll be doing it being held by my arms."

Puck: "—Good. In that case, I'll leave it to you. Though I realize this will be causing you a great deal of trouble down the road."

Seeing Subaru accept his proposal, there was almost a sense of shame in Puck's reply. At this, Subaru closed his eyes, and with "Now then...", he began again,

Subaru: "Are you open to considering a proposal from me as well?"

Puck: "...A proposal?"

Subaru: "Yeah, a proposal. Don't worry though. Just like you, I only act with Emilia's best future interests in mind."

Thumping his own chest, and taking Puck's silence as his assent, Subaru continued,

Subaru: "There are still some things I wanna ask, and some things I wanna try depending on the answers— Emilia could wake up at any moment, so let's keep this short."

Arc 4 Chapter 94 - Abandoned

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 13, Chapter 4 “Lies, Liars, and Con Artists”, Part 1

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Complete](#)

—The first thing she felt upon waking was the loneliness in her empty right hand.

Having just awoken, her head was still drowsy from the lack of blood flow. But, realizing along with her returning consciousness what a selfish sentiment that was, her cheeks flushed red with anger and shame.

Instead of sitting up, she shrank into a ball on the bed and rolled the blankets around her. Reflecting on her own shallowness as she lay there, she was already chastising herself first thing in the morning.

???: “—Selfish, selfish, selfish. I’m... so selfish.”

The girl who had curled up on the bed— Emilia, muttered, exhaling a long, long sigh at her wretched state.

She opened and closed her hand beneath the sheets, remembering the sensation it held just before falling asleep. His fingers were thick and uneven, the skin slightly firmer at the tips, entirely unlike her own which were slender and frail— Every time she had the opportunity to hold his hand, she thought this.

It was the touch of the boy who cared for her, who said those gentle words to her, and who had sat at her bedside, holding her hand until she fell asleep— the touch of Subaru’s clumsy, delicate hand.

Her first unconscious thought upon waking was of the loss of the touch of that hand. To feel so much loneliness from the emptiness of her fingers, just how hopeless is she?

Always wanting to lean on him, was her nature so eager to pile more burdens on that boy? Had she no regard for the irreparable troubles her own weakness and sins have brought to everyone around her?

This was already the fourth day since their arrival in the Sanctuary— and after the first day, and Emilia had devoted both yesterday and the day before to the Trials deep inside the Tomb.

For Emilia, who was aiming to win the Royal Selection and ascend to the throne of Lugunica, acquiring the support of the Sanctuary was the indispensable first step. The governor of this land, Roswaal, was Emilia's backer, and all the residents here were in circumstances similar to herself, being a half-elf. If she couldn't gain their acceptance even with the conditions so stacked in her favor, what could she possibly expect to do from here on out?

Compared to the other candidates of the Royal Selection, Emilia's disadvantages were undeniable. Powerless as she is, she would need the help of those around her to win. And the trust required to secure that help would have to be earned through her own actions.

Fully understanding her position, what Emilia needed to do and to prove in the Sanctuary were clear. She had no doubts in that regard. But, what was casting this shadow over her eyes was—

Emilia: "...the Trials."

The single non-negotiable condition for gaining the Sanctuary's residents' approval was to break through the Trials.

Thanks to the barrier erected by the Tomb, none of the Sanctuary's residents could venture beyond the surrounding forests. In order to bring them into the outside world to fight alongside her, she would need to remove that barrier by overcoming the Trials. And it was also an issue of sentiment, because how could she ask them to support her if she couldn't even do this much for them?

Be it physical or sentimental, everything would be solved by simply passing the Trials. And when a matter is this straightforward, there is no room for arguments or excuses.

However, right now, the problem was the content of the Trial, which was like deadly poison to Emilia.

—The unfeeling voice inside the Tomb told her to face her past.

Whenever she closed her eyes, she would see that world of white. Instantly, as if being thrown naked into that absolute cold, she'd shiver at the unstoppable chill.

Was this dread coursing through her body because she was remembering the cold of that day or because she still hadn't forgotten her fear from back then, even now?

What did Subaru think when he heard her faltering story of her past?

It was yesterday around noon when she revealed it to Subaru—the unforgettable past which still chains her down in guilt to this day.

The night before that, she made her first attempt on the Trial where her heart was soundly beaten. She had been crying in Subaru's arms after he shook her awake, wailing, breaking, until his voice and his gentle strokes on her back managed to calm her. After that, Emilia announced to everyone waiting outside that she had failed her Trial.

She could not remember what expression came onto everyone's faces when they heard this.

The composure for her to check everyone's faces one-by-one was absent. Whether those were gazes of disappointment or disdain, it didn't really matter. She merely put on a strong face, said her good nights, and headed into the residence assigned to her. And when she realized that she was completely alone, she was swallowed by unendurable terror.

Unable to stay holed up like that, she rushed out of the building. While shivering in the night wind, she ran into Subaru walking under the moonlight. Then, when Subaru confessed his resolve and what he would do for her sake, Emilia dismissed him with some idealistic excuses and ran away.

Just how stricken must Subaru have been when he heard what she said? Equally appalled by her own words, Emilia had no idea.

She couldn't remember how she got back to her residence after that. The next time she woke, it was to the sound of Subaru calling her, his face pale as he saw her collapsed on the floor.

She told the worried Subaru about the Trial— And inevitably, it turned into a conversation about her past.

There, she related her past to Subaru without the slightest tampering or fabrication. The way she had been made to witness the crimes she committed, peeling off the scar of those unforgettable memories,

as if exposing her raw wounds to the wind, she revealed it all to Subaru. At the same time, Emilia also confessed her selfish motive for participating in the Royal Selection.

It was not that she was unafraid.

As consequence of the mistake she made in her youth, Emilia had made victims of far too many people. Yet she never paid the price, and even now she was enjoying the time that only she possessed. Even worse, the means she chose for her atonement only wound up dragging even more people into her mess.

Being reviled, despised, and shunned all came natural to Emilia.

And yet, somehow, she believed with the utmost conviction that Subaru would never abandon her. No matter how wretched her past, or how selfishly she yearned for redemption, Natsuki Subaru would never, ever, abandon her.

No matter how badly he got hurt, no matter how much he cried, Subaru would continue to protect her. Over and over and over and over, Emilia had seen this in his actions. This kind, faithful, sentimental youth. Who, despite carrying so many burdens, still refuses to cast anything aside, would continue struggling regardless of his wounds.

Assuming that she herself was a piece of the baggage he carried, then surely, no matter how grotesque her nature may be, he will never let her go.

—It was, in the truest sense, a cruel and abominable thought.

Even if she shook her head, professing to have never thought this way, it'd be a lie to say that it never crossed her mind. And if there a part of her that hoped for this outcome existed, then that was equivalent to the entirety of Emilia affirming the thought.

And so, placing her faith in someone who could never despise her, she confessed to her despicable past. When all is said and done, that's all it was.

Subaru ultimately showed no shock or dismay after hearing Emilia's past, and did not do anything to fault her for her sins. When she was exhausted by her confession and overcome with drowsiness, his touch was still abounding in thoughtfulness as he held her hand, no different than before.

The fact that Subaru did everything just as the repulsive part of herself expected vexed her to no end.

Subaru's usually sharp eyes were softened in worry, concerned for her body and mind. His kindness was like sweet poison to Emilia. It melted her heart, her resolve, and laid every ugliness within herself bare.

If only she could leave it all to him and let him help bear the pain whittling at her heart. If she could say it out loud like some whining child looking away from every unpleasant thing, Subaru would not hesitate for a second to devote his entire being for her sake.

—But that would be unforgivable.

Ever since they first met, Emilia had been receiving Subaru's help. From the loot house in the Capital, to the Witchbeasts threatening the domain, to the gazes in the Royal Selection Hall, to the unknown assailants besieging the village and the mansion, it has been this way.

Emilia was always clinging to Subaru's hand. Unable to bear to see him hurt, believing herself not to be deserving of his kindness, she had once cast his hand aside. But even so, Natsuki Subaru never abandoned Emilia. Not only that, when he finally told her his reason for saving her, he said,

Subaru: "I love you, and so I want to be your strength."

Never once had Emilia received such a wholehearted and entirely baseless confession of love.

The only people who had ever shown Emilia affection had been the elves she lived with in Elixir Forest, and, after her long slumber, the one who became her family, Puck.

Being lured out of the forest by Roswaal, she was once again reminded of the vicious reality of being a half-elf, and her two visits to the Capital only deepened that awareness. While she had accepted Roswaal's plan with the objective of fulfilling her goals, Emilia had also hoped that she could perhaps change the deep-rooted prejudice against half-elves, if only by a little. Yet that hope felt so faint and distant that she hardly believed that it was possible.

And so, just how massive an impact must it have been on Emilia when Subaru, that single-minded youth, ignored the fact she was a half-elf, along with all her hopeless defects, and told her that he loved her?

He wasn't of the same race, nor was it decided at birth that he existed solely to accompany her. He was just someone she had met by chance, grown close to, and, after all they've shared together, came to care for— Just how much of a salvation must this have been for Emilia?

And precisely because of this, Emilia mustn't rely on Subaru anymore.

Every hardship he bears for Emilia would mean another wound carved into his body. Not only wounds of the flesh, but of the heart as well.

Subaru was not particularly strong in body nor mind, Emilia knew this. Even with a heart abounding in resolve and the will to care for those around him, he was no one special at all. He could be wounded by sadness, he'd cry when he's hurt, and if he bled too much he'd die.

He was just that kind of ordinary person.

Emilia didn't want that ordinary youth to bear any more pain on her behalf.

She desired nothing further than for him to keep supporting her back, standing at her side, while she proceeded forward. Though it was such a selfish wish that Emilia couldn't help but feel ashamed. Should he support her frail resolve, then surely Emilia could overcome her obstacles without folding.

And she must be the one to fight those obstacles ahead of her. Herself.

Emilia: "After all, if I don't..."

If she continues relying on him, leaving everything to him, clinging to him, pushing everything on him, eventually, Subaru will come to think of her as a burden.

Just the thought that that day would come filled her with dread.

It was something she had avoided believing she wanted. It was something she had given up on, reasoning that even should she desire it, she would never get it. It was something she had kept out of her awareness, but something she had always wished for deep inside.

And because she had gotten it, because it had been bestowed to her, because she had taken the hand offered to her— Emilia couldn't bear the thought of losing it.

Emilia: “———”

Emilia’s sins had painted the forest in white and sealed all her friends and family beneath ice and snow.

Emilia herself also fell asleep within that ice, and nearly a hundred years went by before Puck woke her, all without being aware of her crime.

That grave and abhorrent sin was only made worse by the fact that Emilia herself could not remember a single tangible detail about her deed. Everything in-between was blank, and, aside from the knowledge that her act had plunged everyone into white stagnation, she could not remember a thing as to why, or what she was thinking in those moments.

Witch’s Daughter. That name felt natural to Emilia.

After Puck woke her from the ice, she spent seven years in the Great Eltor Forest. Unable to find or cultivate any food inside the frozen woods, she would walk to the nearby villages outside the forest and rely on them for most of her food.

She could not forget their terrified gazes or how they called her the Witch of the Frozen Forest.

Witch. That insult suited her.

She had been stuttering about having the resolve necessary to overcome the Trials, but even she felt that those words were hollow. Emilia could not even imagine how she might defeat her past. So she merely evaded Subaru’s questions with pleasant words and chose to shut herself in her cask of dreams.

Assured by the unmistakable touch of Subaru’s palm, she fell asleep not long after.

—She doubted she dreamed anything back then.

When she woke, Subaru was still in the same posture as before, watching over her as she slept. An unbearable emotion overran her chest as she saw this, and, as he led her by the hand, they stepped out into the Sanctuary, to challenge the Trial.

The outcome was obvious. She didn’t pass her Trial.

Subaru and Ram saw her off just outside the Tomb. And with Garfiel, Ryuzu, and the Sanctuary's residents' gazes at her back, she walked in. But without a single clue as to what she should do, the Trial heartlessly rejected her.

After being tormented, corroded, trampled by her unchangeable past, Emilia was tossed back once more. When she returned to consciousness on the cold, hard floor of the Tomb, Emilia noticed that her cheeks were wet. This crying was ridiculous, and her wretchedness was loathsome.

Unable to grasp a single clue to overcoming the Trials, Emilia left the Tomb haggard and frail, only to be welcomed by the worried Subaru and the others. Then, just like the night before, she was lulled into sleep in this building, losing consciousness just after tumbling into bed— Which she only realized this morning.

Emilia: "In the end, there's no progress at all... I'm so useless..."

If she learned anything yesterday, it would be that she is a hopeless, spoiled child who is always causing trouble for Subaru and everyone around her— And, yet, does not possess the slightest hope of getting better. That's the kind of weak existence she is.

Emilia: "Puck..."

The pendant hanging at her chest— and the green luster of the stone adorning its tip, is the Anchor of Emilia's spiritual Contract with Puck. Whenever she softly calls his name, he'd answer in his carefree tone, "What is it?" in accordance to the Contract.

But it's been almost two weeks since he stopped responding.

At first, she thought he was merely in his hibernation period, which he goes into once every few months. There were also times before when Puck would suddenly stop responding, and every time it happened, Emilia would try to endure the loneliness as she waited for him to wake.

However, his hibernation periods usually ended after three or four days, and this is the first time it has been this long. What's more, even if Puck were to be in his hibernation, if Emilia truly tried to call him, he would interrupt his sleep and answer her. But now, she couldn't even sense that reaction from the distant Puck.

Could something have happened to him? Did something change during his hibernation that would prevent him from manifesting again? And if that's the case, what should she do?

Even after the long, long time Emilia had spent with Puck, she still couldn't think of a way to reach him once he left her like this.

Whether it was about the Trials, Subaru, the resolution of her past, or the missing Puck, Emilia did not have a single solution to any of her problems.

Emilia: "...I'm, so stupid."

Faced with this dead end, just when she was about to complain about the absence of the one who should be there for her, she stopped herself.

Because, if she did that, then she would truly be lost beyond saving— Even though Emilia's opinion of herself was already lower than ever before, she didn't want to think that she could sink even lower than this.

Emilia: "Mmm, stop it. Even if I keep thinking like this... He's not going to show up today. But Puck must have his reasons. And there's been no progress on the Trials yet. I need to keep it together."

She lifted her hands and gave her white cheeks a few pats, as if to pump some willpower into herself. Then, looking up, she picked up a comb and ran it through her messy hair. It pained her that she had to do this herself. That was because this part had always been tasked to Puck, and Emilia never had to take the initiative to look after her own grooming.

Running her hand through her hair, she confirmed that the knots are gone. She doesn't use a mirror. The one originally there was already wrapped up in cloth and placed in a corner of the room so that it would not reflect anything.

As her fingers fiddle with the ends of her hair, Emilia determines that she has succeeded in the bare minimum of arrangements. She then sweeps her fingers up through her silver tresses, bunching it together as she begins to plait.

This was in preparation for her braid— Puck was the one in charge of Emilia's daily hairstyles and it was especially important that she obeyed it, since it was an clause in their Contract. That was why, over the

two weeks since Puck gave her his pick for her hairstyle, Emilia had continued adhering to the last instruction he had given her.

And of course, she also continued attending to the other tedious and miscellaneous articles like exercising before and after bathing and talking to Micro Spirits daily. After all, if she stopped abiding by those terms, her connection with the missing Puck would be lost, and that terrified her to no end.

Emilia: “———There.”

Dividing her hair down the middle and weaving them into two braids had been how she had always done it. But today, she wove it into a single long braid running down her back.

Having kept that part of her Contract with Puck for the day, she prayed for the Contract’s continuance. Confirming the definite connection inside her, she——

Emilia: “...Huh?”

Intending to change her clothes before Ram shows up with a bucket of water, Emilia spilled a small cry. Her amethyst eyes widened in shock as her gaze landed on the pendant at her chest.

Just as she checked before, the green crystal was still hanging at the end of the pendant as proof of Puck’s existence—— except a crack had formed on its surface.

Emilia: “Wh... No, huh...? Wait... Wh—what...?”

Clenching the crystal that had begun cracking of its own accord, Emilia let slip sounds that could not be considered words.

Her pupils shook with a violent jolt as she timidly stroked her trembling fingers over the crystal’s surface. From her fingertips came the sensation of the crack widening, prompting her to relinquish a small, strangled cry.

Emilia: “N—n—no... No, don’t... Please, wait... No, Puck, wait...”

As much as she shook her head in rejection, it did not stem the crystal’s fracture.

She applied all her effort into keeping her hand steady so as not to disturb it further, but her uncontrollable trembling only hastened the crystal's collapse as it began to disintegrate in her hand.

What will happen if the damage spreads to the whole crystal?

Faced with this unprecedented scenario, this never-imagined situation, Emilia's head went perfectly blank. But there was one thing she did know. And that is,

Emilia: "If this keeps going... Puck will...!"

It would mean the goodbye between Emilia and the being who was like her only family.

Emilia: "———!"

She raised her head. Looked around. There was no one there. It was early morning, and there were no signs of activity from people who had woken. Even if she screamed, likely no one would hear her. If she ran outside for help, the shaking would likely instantly spell the end, and so, Emilia did not move.

Stifling her voice, stopping her breath, Emilia gazed at the disintegrating crystal in her hand.

She had no solution. At this point, rather than preventing the impending end, all she could do was frantically try to delay it all the while being horrified by her decision.

Emilia: "—Ah."

As the reward for her slothfulness, the crisp sound of the crystal cracking rang out.

In her palms, as her eyes widened in stupefaction, the green crystal lost all semblance of shape. The stone shattered in all directions, the fragments lost their color, and, devoid of life's rhythms, its luster gradually faded.

Emilia: "Sa... y... Puck, you are... just kidding, right?"

As if clinging to the last strand of hope, Emilia went on calling to her palm in her faltering voice.



Illustration from Volume 13, coloring by Under_The_Bedsheets ([source](#))

But the jewel in her hand, having lost its form, was now nothing more than a pile of turquoise-colored sand. Never mind a Spirit, even its capacity to store the slightest load of Mana was gone. All that was left was green-colored dust, waiting to be cast to the wind.

Anyone could see that Emilia's fleeting hopes were in vain. The only one who did not accept the reality of their futility was Emilia herself.

Emilia: "N—no, no, this can't... This can't be happening... After, after all, Puck... when we first met, you said... you'll be my family... and I'll never be alone anymore..."

Evoking their agreement, muttering back his promise under her breath, Emilia repeated those words like a small child.

—But before her pleading appeals, the powdered rock only answered with silence.

Emilia: "—Li... ar."

Presented with that unacceptable reality, as if unable to bear the silence, and with eyes that seemed to be beginning to understand, she turned up to the ceiling with her amethyst gaze wavering and in tears,

Emilia: "Puck... Daddy, YOU LIAR!!"

Falling to her knees, she hurled the scattered fragments against the wall. The sound of stone shards striking the wooden surface had sealed Emilia and Puck's overly abrupt parting.

Emilia buried her face in her hands while sobs went on leaking from her palms.

No tears flowed out.

Weighing on her chest was only a hollow sense of emptiness where something should be.

Arc 4 Chapter 95 - Sigma

Has been cut from the Light Novel Adaptation

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

Ram: “Barusu. Have you made any progress with your nefarious plotting?”

Leaving Emilia after she had cried herself to sleep, Subaru ran into Ram as soon as he exited the building. His hand still on the door, Subaru squinted his eyes at Ram, who was apparently waiting for him to come out.

Subaru: “«Nefarious plotting» sounds super disreputable and kinda scary, so could you please stop it?”

Ram: “You two men are stealthily hiding things from everyone else as you design your plans, yes? Since Roswaal-sama has given his consent, I won’t say anything about that merchant doing as he pleases around the Sanctuary, but...”

This “merchant” Ram spoke of was probably Otto. Although they were both living inside the Sanctuary, Ram, who spent most of her time tending to Roswaal, had only very brief interactions with Otto. Most likely, their best talking opportunity would be during the periods during which Emilia is facing the Trial, as they wait outside for her.

As for Otto, he was really only here because Subaru brought him along. So, without having much information regarding his personality, he was no doubt lacking in credibility as far as Ram was concerned.

And even for Subaru, personality aside, Otto’s competence as a travelling merchant was still up for debate. Just from his meeting with Roswaal, it was obvious that he was more suited for the role of a straight man¹⁵² than a merchant.

¹⁵² The serious man in a duo of characters in a comedy performance (for more info, see [here](#)).

Nevertheless, it was true that Roswaal had given Otto permission to stay in the Sanctuary. Unable to openly expel him, Ram's opinion of Otto had always been harsh.

Subaru: "Well, that's something he'll have to work hard towards on his own. I won't try to change your mind about that."

Ram: "That doesn't sound like something a friend should say. When he's so intent on helping you, shouldn't you at least make some effort to repay him, Barusu?"

Subaru: "Friend... Huh. I mean, I won't say anything to contradict that, but does it look like we are friends to you?"

Ram: "When you've abandoned all restraint and are interacting with such familiarity... Do you intend to suggest it is not the case? If that's just how you interact with anyone regardless of your relationship, that's quite a horrifying thought."

Ram hugged her shoulders and made a show of shuddering. At her words and her reaction, Subaru's cheeks slightly softened as he chuckled from the depths of his throat.

As if creeped out by Subaru's stifled laugh, Ram backed up a step while still holding her shoulders, putting some distance between them,

Ram: "Now, Barusu, I'll repeat my question— Have you made any progress with your nefarious plotting?"

Subaru: "Well you... could say it's slowly coming along, but there are still some kinks to work out."

Regardless of the details, her true intentions were obvious. This was Ram, a card in the hand of Subaru's contracted opponent, Roswaal. Although Subaru wasn't sure to what extent he could trust her, chances were, she was carrying out the task of acting as the eyes and ears of the bedridden Roswaal. Because of that, it was inevitable she would take an interest in their movements. As for the way she was grilling him directly on the matter, that was just the kind of thing Ram would do.

Subaru: "And what about you? You came here for Emilia, right? You shouldn't be wasting time talking to me."

Ram: "Since Barusu already came out, you must've made sure that she'd fallen asleep, correct? Falling asleep after so much bawling, she won't wake up anytime soon."

Subaru: "...That's a pretty harsh opinion."

Ram: "It's a frank and objective opinion. You should keep that in mind for reference."

Tossing out that blunt remark, Ram stared at the side of Subaru's lowered face. Feeling the pressure of her gaze, Subaru pressed back a sigh inside his chest.

—The termination of Emilia and Puck's Contract had happened about two and a half hours ago.

Despite having discussed the matter with Puck beforehand and having prepared himself for the confusion, grief, and shock that would strike Emilia in its wake, the regret he felt was indescribable when he actually saw her.

As if having lost the only lynchpin holding her together, Emilia was half-crazed and wailing. Her beautiful silver hair was a mess, her nails had scratched her fair skin, and she was indiscriminately hurling all the objects around her, laying her emotions bare like a child in the middle of a tantrum.

It was fortune amidst misfortune that she did not have the option of using magic in her rampage, both for herself and for those around her.

In any case, knowing what was going to happen, Subaru had been waiting outside, and when he heard her shrieking, he flew in and took her tightly into his arms. Then, for the next two and a half hours, he alone tended to her faltering cries, laments, and her frail acts of destruction, until at last he had set her in bed and left.

And then, just when he wanted to ask Ram to help change Emilia's clothes and wipe down her body, he ran into her right outside the door. Perhaps she was thinking the same thing and had been waiting for him to come out. When he saw her there with her water bucket and towel, Subaru certainly felt some sense of relief.

While Subaru was occupied with such thoughts, Ram quietly whispered,

Ram: "Barusu— Are you really putting your hopes in her?"

Subaru: "..."

Ram: "Just considering Emilia-sama's state up until last night, there was not a single indication that would lead one to believe she would overcome the Trials. And to compound on this, a situation I believed could not degrade any further, worsened. The Great Spirit-sama has left Emilia-sama's side, correct?"

Subaru: "...So you know that too, huh."

Ram: "When it's being screamed, repeatedly, so loud that you can clearly hear it from outside the building, even an idiot could figure it out. And if Barusu could figure it out, then Ram could figure it out. Isn't that obvious?"

Subaru: "I'm getting the feeling that I'm being equated to an idiot here, but I can't dispute what you are saying. Emilia's situation has just worsened, there's no getting around that fact..."

Honestly, Ram's voiced concerns precisely mirrored Subaru's own anxieties.

Though he didn't go so far as to swallow Puck's words whole, Subaru did agree to his proposal. That was the truth.

Puck claimed his presence was the factor stopping Emilia from facing her genuine past.

Those more-than-minor changes between the loops and Subaru's misgivings about Roswaal's Gospel, Beatrice's screams, Emilia's testimonies, and Puck's existence— All of these factors combined led Subaru to accept Puck's proposal, condemning Emilia into that prison of solitude. The result was that, for the first time in her life, she was truly and unequivocally alone.

The necessary factors for her to escape this are time, and an opportunity, yet she had neither of those things right now. Her circumstances would not give her any reprieve to sort out her feelings, and the strength to jumpstart the process existed only within herself.

It was up to Emilia to find her way out. Ram understood this, and did not believe that any such change was coming. And aside that last part, Subaru agreed with Ram completely.

Subaru: "Even so, I'm still placing my hopes in her, and I still believe in her."

Ram: "...That's an optimistic expression. And what are you basing your high hopes on, exactly?"

Subaru: “I’ve decided to believe in what I feel I should believe in, that’s all. And thanks to the friend who’s trying so hard to help me and the dragon who’s always saving me... I’ve come to believe in myself a little more.”

Ram: “And what does that have to do with believing in Emilia-sama...”

Subaru: “Since I’ve already come to believe in myself, what’s so wrong with believing in the one I have a crush on? I like Emilia, and I want to become her strength. I like her, partly because she’s super pretty and all... but the real reason... is something else.”

Looking back at Ram’s suspicious gaze, Subaru shrugged.

The first time Subaru began having feelings for Emilia was when he was first summoned to this parallel world— left hopeless and with nothing to cling to, she was the first person who was kind to him. She saved his life, and over the time he’d spent with her, Subaru came to know the girl named Emilia and began wanting to help her. Part of it was justified as wanting to repay a debt, but, at the time, even Subaru wasn’t fully aware of the truth behind it.

And then he lost her, Returned by Death and in doing so, reset the world, but the shared memories of their meeting were gone. But still, Subaru changed the future and saved her from the fate of death. Everything that happened at the mansion, at the Capital, and in the battles against the Witch Cult— all of it had started from the passion of that very first feeling which continued to burn at his back every step of the way.

She saved him in the Capital. She saved him in the mansion when he was about to crumble.

And for saving his life and his heart, he had wanted to repay her, but, in his conceit, he only wounded her.

In the time they’d spent apart, a mutual gap developed between them. But, given the chance to reflect on his actions, he stood up once more.

Felling the White Whale, defeating Petelgeuse, and fighting on even now, what was it all for?

Having let go of his past and bid his parents farewell, having realized his deep connection to the Witch, why was he still striving, spurred on by an incomprehensible power even now?

Subaru: "It's because I love her."

Ram: "———"

Subaru: "The girl I fell in love with... is persevering, stubborn, not honest with her feelings at all, and won't admit that she wants to cry even when she does... She's the kind of girl who wouldn't hesitate to risk her life for someone else's."

Ram: "You are the one convincing yourself of that, Barusu. Yes, Emilia-sama has the tendency to put others before herself... but that's just her way of safeguarding her own heart, isn't it? It's a mechanism to protect herself from the contempt of those around her, isn't it? You fell for it through and through, so does it not bother you that you are being used?"

Subaru: "No."

Hearing her lengthy question answered with a single syllable, Ram was left speechless.

Feeling some satisfaction at this rare reaction, Subaru looked back at the building behind him. His thoughts turned to Emilia, presently asleep in her bed.

Subaru: "I don't mind being used as she pleases. And even if, deep down, she thinks of me as a tool that won't break no matter how much I'm used, I'm fine with that."

Ram: "You don't mind being treated as a tool?"

Subaru: "It's not that. It's because as long as she has a use for me, it means she still has the will to keep standing and move forward... and that makes me glad. As long as she still has the strength to lift her head... I will do anything I can to help her. So she can use me however she likes."

Ram: "———"

At Subaru's proclamation, Ram narrowed her eyes in displeasure.

It was a rather fresh experience for Subaru to see this from a girl who seldom showed emotion. To unhesitatingly accept being used as a tool, that's almost like how she herself—

Subaru: "And here I thought you of all people would understand."

Ram: “—What makes you think that?”

Subaru: “I just figured, from what I’ve seen of your attitude and behavior up to now... you aren’t much different yourself. I thought you’d understand when other people feel the same way.”

Ram: “When you are projecting your own unresolved issues onto other people, you’ll think everyone feels the same way you do. Especially when you realize that the other person has settled the issues you yourself couldn’t resolve.”

Throwing back that rapid-fire retort, Ram looked away, as if embarrassed by what she had just said. Then, she let out a small sigh and waved for Subaru to move away from the door,

Ram: “Well, enough. If you want to be a tool, then be a tool and do your utmost for your master. Meanwhile, Ram will conduct herself as Ram sees fit. That is Ram’s freedom, is it not?”

Subaru: “Yeah. You do what you want— It’s just.”

As Ram passed beside him and put her hand to the door, Subaru called to the back of her head. Ram stopped and turned him a glance, nodding as if prompting him to continue,

Subaru: “I’m not devoting myself to Emilia without expecting anything in return, you know.”

Ram: “...”

Subaru: “There are things that I’m looking for from Emilia. The things I want won’t happen without Emilia’s help. Earlier, I said I’m fine with her using me, but... I’m definitely planning on using her as well.”

It’s a bad way of putting it, but interacting with people with motives in mind is inevitable.

Ultimately, the future Subaru desired was one which everyone here would reach. In other words, by the time Subaru would have reached that future, he would have to have used every single one of them to the fullest.

He wanted to be used by Emilia. Just like how, to reach his perfect future, he would use Emilia, hold her close, and never let go.

Ram: “———”

Without a word, Ram turned away and walked into the house.

But just before the closing door completely concealed her small figure from behind——

Subaru: “Things have already diverged from the Gospel’s writ—— In this world, Roswaal’s already free.”

No answer came to confirm whether she had heard those final words. With the sound of the door closing, Subaru was now cut off from everything that was happening inside.

That said, it was highly improbable that Emilia would wake up and get rough with Ram. This was partly because he judged that, having cried herself to sleep, Emilia shouldn’t have the energy to do anything of the sort. But more importantly, he judged it would take much, much longer before her body would be ready to wake up.

Subaru: “Tomorrow’s my big day. The day after’s a spare... Either way, it’s cutting it close.”

At the end of his time limit, Roswaal will bring about the snowfall, and the Great Rabbit will come. It will spell the end of the Sanctuary. This loop will end in failure, and, most importantly, Subaru will be bound by his Contract.

In accordance with his Contract with Roswaal L. Mathers, Natsuki Subaru will be forced to sacrifice everyone else to save the one thing most important to him.

——And, at that thought, Subaru wondered why he only realized it this late.

Subaru: “Fighting for the one future that I couldn’t give up on... That’s what I’m already doing, isn’t it?”

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——Subaru’s battle inside the Sanctuary has now entered its third day.

The deadline of his Contract with Roswaal is on the sixth day. However, the calamities simultaneously threatening the Sanctuary and the mansion will be unstoppable by that time, so his actual deadline is

the night of the fifth day. Which means, tonight included, Emilia has only three chances left to challenge the Trials. However, the first of those three scant opportunities——

Subaru: “Tonight’s probably gonna be a bust.”

After Puck’s disappearance and then breaking down crying through the morning, by the time Emilia fainted from exhaustion, it was already almost noon. Her sleep was so deep that she wasn’t showing the slightest indication of waking.

Even if she could wake up before nightfall, how much more time would she need before she could face the reality that Puck was gone? ——The bond she had with Puck wasn’t shallow to the point it could be processed away in a few hours.

Just when they had no time to spare, a problem like this showed up that could only be solved with time. While aware of the pointlessness of cursing an insidious god’s decrees, Subaru still rather wants to curse them.

Subaru: “Seeing her cry so much from losing you... I’m actually a little jealous, but I still hate you a hundred times more, Puck.”

With the little grey cat briefly popping into his mind, Subaru shook his head and looked forward once more. For now, there was nothing he could do for the sleeping Emilia. The very best he can do is hold her hand. If it could protect her from her nightmares, then he would gladly do it for as long as necessary.

But, just like how Emilia had no time to spare, neither did Subaru. He has not gotten everything in place for the bet yet. His plan involved several uncertain factors to begin with, and even after assembling all potential resources and bolstering his hand to its absolute limit, his chances would still only stand at fifty-fifty. Or rather, even that was probably optimistic.

Subaru: “And so, I’m banking a lot on this conversation, Ryuzu-san.”

???: “And I have high expectations of you too, Su-bo... The two before me have told me a great deal about you, after all.”

With the sound of gravel crunching underfoot, a small figure— Ryuzu, appeared at the door of their meeting place. Making a sour face quite unbecoming of her youthful features, she looked around the locale Subaru had selected, and then, with “Although...”,

Ryuzu: “Choosing this place for our meeting... You can be pretty unkind, Su-bo.”

Subaru: “I figured it’d be a good choice if we don’t want to be interrupted. If we met in front of the crystal, I might be too distracted to talk. And no matter how many times I go back there, I don’t think I can ever get used to that smell.”

He pinched his nose, expressing his disdain for the Experimental Grounds’ nose-wrenching stench. Ryuzu did mention it was her home, but it was very likely she also shared his sentiment. Giving a small chuckle at Subaru’s words, admitting “You might be right”, Ryuzu nodded.

Ryuzu: “But I can’t say I’m pleased that you chose Gar-bo’s secret base as the substitute. If you wanted somewhere secret... there should’ve been plenty of other options.”

Subaru: “But if it were to happen in the village, we wouldn’t know who’d be listening in. Garfiel and Frederica’s childhood house, though... It might be a little mean, but I’m sure you’d be just as troubled as I’d be if someone were to overhear us?”

Ryuzu: “No doubt.”

Subaru shrugged, seeking her agreement, while Ryuzu nodded with a slight grin. With this, Ryuzu stepped into the small, shoddy cabin made from scraps and dilapidated wood.

Subaru: “Sorry I didn’t prepare a comfy sofa beforehand. Despite my profound consideration for the elderly, it pains me that I don’t even have a chair to offer you.”

Ryuzu: “Goodness, so you are going to make me stand here and talk? Taking the whip to the elderly, kids today really aren’t what they used to be.”

Subaru: “Ugh, that line really sounded like an old person just now. You don’t miss a beat on the elderly appeal, huh.”

Subaru wryly smiled at the sight of Ryuzu knocking on her perfectly straight back as if it were creaking all over. Then, Subaru invited her into the center of the small cabin while he crossed his arms and leaned against a wall.

Subaru: “Actually, as far as I’m concerned, just going on gossiping with a cute girl doesn’t sound too bad.”

Ryuzu: “Humbug. I’m a tad too advanced in the years to be called a girl, don’t you think?”

Subaru: “If we are talking about age, my main heroine’s quite a bit my senior, too. Though her apparent age and mental age don’t line up with her real age at all, as I found out recently.”

Actual age— a hundred years old. Apparent age— eighteen years old. Mental age— fourteen years old. Emilia’s genre is so deliciously complicated that Subaru could never get tired of flaunting that fact. At first, he thought she should be classified as a loli-granny but turns out she’s a granny-loli.

Now Subaru could finally understand why Emilia seemed so immature, timid, and idealistic for her appearance yet tended to say such granny-like things.

Subaru: “And for Emilia’s sake too, I want to do everything I can— So, I’ll be asking you all kinds of things, Ryuzu Sigma-san.”

Ryuzu: “Sig... what?”

Subaru: “Sorry, just something I came up with. It can get kinda confusing if I call all four of you Ryuzu-san, so I conveniently labeled you Alpha, Beta, Sigma, Theta to keep track.”

Ryuzu: “...”

Hearing Subaru’s explanation, Ryuzu placed her hand to her lips in thought.

Subaru furrowed his brows at the reaction that couldn’t exactly be called displeased, and, seeing that she wasn’t raising any objections, he held up a single finger,

Subaru: “Anyway, I’m glad we finally got a chance to talk. After all, considering your position, Sig... today’s Ryuzu-san, I figured you might not have wanted to talk.”

Ryuzu: “Sigma’s fine if you are having trouble. Seeing how you want to refer to us as individuals, it’s only fitting that you call us different things... Though there’s never been a need for that until now.”

Subaru: “Really? Then I’ll happily oblige. If you want a cuter name, though, I could work something out with the other three as well.”

Ryuzu: “—No, Sigma’s fine. In fact, please just use Sigma.”

Ryuzu revised her answer with a slight change in nuance.

Blinking at that response, Subaru figured that Ryuzu wasn’t interested in continuing with that topic. “Now”, Ryuzu continued, changing the subject,

Sigma: “I’m pretty sure I already know, but... what would you like to talk about, Su-bo? How much do you know about the circumstances the Sanctuary’s wrapped up in?”

Subaru: “Well, I guess I want to know everything I don’t know already... But, for now, I want to know what you saw in the Tomb, Sigma-san. Yesterday I heard from Alpha-san there were two Ryuzu-sans who challenged the Trials. Sigma-san is one of them, correct?”

Sigma: “Correct. I am one of the two Ryuzus to have entered the Tomb. But that said, I only went in once, and briefly... It was nothing more than stepping inside to bring Gar-bo out after he ignored the agreement and went in the Tomb.”

What Ryuzu Sigma was relating was just what Subaru had heard from Frederica before. Hoping to liberate the Sanctuary, Garfiel entered the Tomb, but when he didn’t come back, his sister went to ask Ryuzu for help. The one Frederica fetched must have been Sigma, who was standing before him now.

Subaru: “It was just stepping inside... But you must have seen something after you went in, right? Like, your... Your past, maybe.”

Sigma: “———”

Subaru: “If the Tomb totally hates you like it hates Roswaal, your body would’ve been repulsed the moment you went inside. Roswaal almost exploded, and Patrasche got riddled with wounds when she

went in to drag me out. So going in there without qualification must've required just as much resolve as someone challenging the Trial."

Sigma: "It's entirely possible that I was prepared to be wounded when I went in, isn't it?"

Subaru: "That would've made a beautiful story... but then how do you explain the fact that Sigma-san is opposed to liberating the Sanctuary? That doesn't make much sense."

Sigma: "———"

It was information she had never confessed to— neither Ryuzu Sigma nor Theta had ever openly expressed opposition to liberating the Sanctuary. But Sigma chose to react with silence without denying it.

And, in practice, her silence was equivalent to affirmation.

Subaru: "You saw your past inside the Tomb. And because of that, you've come to abhor the possibility of liberating the Sanctuary. So, what exactly did you see?"

Sigma: "———"

Subaru: "In terms of possibilities... you saw the circumstances of your birth, maybe? It could be when you were born from the crystal, or it could even be..."

Sigma: "Ryuzu Meyer's past, you mean?"

Before Subaru could finish, Sigma struck the core of the matter. Wordlessly, Subaru tightened his lips, silently acknowledging that continuation.

Going by the name of Ryuzu Meyer ever since they were born, these four Ryuzu replicants have taken up the role of the representative of the Sanctuary. If there was anything in their past worth regretting, Subaru imagined it would have to be before this life— before they became the Ryuzus they were now.

And he could now see from Sigma's reaction that he wasn't mistaken in this thought.

Subaru: “If the past you saw was the past of the original Ryuzu-san inside the crystal... I can imagine why you’d be afraid, Sigma-san. The reason she was sealed inside the crystal must also be the reason behind this, right?”

Sigma: “...”

The one who sealed Ryuzu Meyer inside the crystal was the Witch of Greed, Echidna. Remembering the event of being sealed by the Witch should have been more than enough to make Sigma give up on the Trials. But,

Sigma: “My, my, Su-bo, just how much do you know?”

Subaru: “...”

Sigma: “What happened to the Ryuzu Meyer inside the crystal is known to only a few select people in the Sanctuary. And I highly doubt that any of those who knew would have revealed it to you, Su-bo.”

There was a certain hesitation on the side of Sigma’s expression. Without turning her gaze to the speechless Subaru, Sigma looked up to the ceiling.

Sigma: “I don’t think even Ros-bo, or the other Ryuzu who knows about the Tomb... would have told you. So just where did you hear this from, Su-bo?”

Subaru: “———”

Subaru wasn’t sure how he should respond. It was a rather basic question, but far from simple.

A tingle ran up the back of his neck as he sensed the shift in the air. It was the perilous atmosphere that Subaru had experienced many times before— Although the matter wasn’t one of life-or-death, it was a moment which would determine the outcomes of the life-or-death crossroads to be faced afterwards.

It was a sensation reminiscent of the scene in Crusch’s mansion at the time he asked her for her help in the battle against the White Whale.

In other words, the outcome of the exchange this instant will tilt the entire future of the Sanctuary.

Subaru: “———”

Falling into silence once more, Subaru painstakingly contemplated his response.

The answer Sigma requested of him will shape everything that comes after.

Subaru was never good at reading other people's emotions. In fact, he was overwhelmingly ignorant when it came to subtleties. So it wasn't just a matter of turning a few gears in his head, but a mental task requiring setting every brain cell aflame just for him to reach the level of a normal person.

In this case, the answer Subaru chose to give was—

Subaru: "I heard it from Echidna. In the Tomb."

Sigma: "—From the Witch-sama?"

Hearing the name of the Witch, Sigma's expression slightly tensed.

Over the time he'd spent in the Sanctuary, Subaru had come to painfully understand the heavy significance of Echidna's name. Roswaal hated hearing her being referred to as Witch of Greed, while Garfiel and Ryuzu both avoided calling her Echidna.

Echidna's name was most likely a taboo to them. And as for whether it was in a good or a bad sense, it would certainly depend on what kind of shock they had experienced in their past. He was taking a chance on how she would react when he violated that taboo, but Subaru had made his choice.

Subaru: "Well, my Qualification has been revoked now, but I was qualified to challenge the Trials at one point. So I know a thing or two about what it's like inside the Trial. Same goes for what Echidna's planning, why she created the Sanctuary, and why she made replicants like Sigma-san."

Sigma: "...I did have a feeling you knew too much to have heard it from Ros-bo."

Subaru: "And that's why I know a bit more than what you expected, Sigma-san. Now that I've told you all I know, I was kinda hoping it would help you decide what to reveal or withhold from me."

Sigma: "Always the flatterer."

Sigma wryly smiled at Subaru's backpedaling statement. Then, she placed her small palm to her forehead and exhaled a long sigh. It was a necessary ritual for her to make up her mind.

Sigma: “Since you already know the Witch-sama’s connection to the Sanctuary and about me and Ryuzu Meyer, it’d probably be strange if I kept hiding it from you...”

Subaru: “So then...”

Sigma: “Don’t rush. I understand how you feel, Su-bo... but it’s not that simple— What you want to ask me is «What did Ryuzu see inside the Trial», correct?”

Subaru was about to confirm with a “Yes” when a subtle sense of awryness led him to hold his words.

Sigma said “Ryuzu” rather than “I” just now. But just when Subaru furrowed his brows, contemplating her true intentions, Sigma simultaneously muttered “Sharp one”,

Sigma: “If the question was about the past I saw in the Tomb, my answer would be «I don’t know». After all, I did not take the Trial inside the Tomb. Although I was certainly the one who returned from the Tomb.”

Subaru: “...And what... does that mean?”

Sigma: “It’s simple. Don’t you think it strange, Su-bo? There should only have been one chance for Ryuzu to enter the Tomb to bring Gar-bo out. And yet, there were two Ryuzu Meyer replicants who had entered the Tomb. The number of chances and people don’t match up at all.”

Subaru: “Ah...”

Only when it was pointed out for him did Subaru realize what an idiot he had been. Indeed, she was completely right. There were two Ryuzus who entered the Tomb, yet only one chance to enter— There could only be one explanation to eliminate this contradiction.

Subaru: “The Ryuzu-san who went in... is not the Ryuzu-san who came out...”

Sigma: “Precisely. According to your arrangement... the Ryuzu who came out would be Ryuzu Sigma, myself. And the Ryuzu who went in, that would be Ryuzu Theta. The one who saw her past was Ryuzu Theta, while I merely brought Gar-bo outside. As for my stance, rather than being opposed to the Sanctuary’s liberation, the process of elimination should leave me at neutral.”

And so, she looked to the near-dejected Subaru and continued.

Sigma: “—If there is anything I can tell you, it would be what Gar-bo had been so desperately hiding. The past that child saw... or rather, fragments of it, anyway.”

Arc 4 Chapter 96 - Red Drawn at the Lips

Has been cut from the Light Novel Adaptation

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Complete](#)

Subaru: “Fragments... of the past Garfiel saw...”

Sigma: “Just as it sounds, they are no more than fragments. It was me who carried him out of the Tomb while he muttered, delirious and sobbing. As such I know the rough outlines.”

Swallowing his breath, Subaru turned to Sigma.

Garfiel’s past was not what he had expected to talk about with Sigma, but it was nonetheless one of the issues Subaru needed to sort out. Though it was out of order, he had no complaints about getting this information now.

Subaru: “Can you tell me? What did that gu... What did Garfiel see in his past that made him want to give up on freeing the Sanctuary? What could he have seen to have made him so opposed to letting the residents go outside?”

Sigma: “—What that child saw... was his mother’s farewell.”

Subaru: “Her, farewell?”

Subaru felt something gouge at his chest.

Garfiel’s parting with his mother— It didn’t sound unrelated to Subaru’s own Trial at all. But unlike Subaru, who could look back on his parting with a happy heart, Garfiel’s probably wasn’t so pleasant. And that must be why he was so obsessively bound to the Sanctuary.

Sigma: “Su-bo, do you know about that child’s mother?”

Subaru: "...I heard a little from Frederica before. Their mother was an ordinary human, and there were some half-bloods... Well, stuff happened, and those two were born... And then she left them in the Sanctuary."

Sigma: "Heartlessly, she left by herself to find her own happiness... That's the gist of it."

Filling in the part that Subaru had trouble voicing, a fleeting smile rose on Sigma's face. Her statement is exactly what Frederica had told him about their mother. As well as saying that their mother's turbulent life was likely the providence of her proportionally poor luck.

If he remembered correctly, Frederica and Garfiel each took one of their parent's surnames. Frederica took her father's, Baumann. While Garfiel took his mother's, Tinzal.

Subaru: "But, Frederica said their mother left them when they were still very little... If he saw his memories from back then, just how vivid could those memories have been?"

Sigma: "Have you forgotten that the Trial was created by Echidna, who holds the Book of Wisdom? Rather than from the vague, unreliable memories that remain, it shapes the world using the memories that are closer to what actually happened... It shouldn't have been much different from the scene he saw as a young child."

Subaru: "..."

Without any basis to refute her, Subaru pondered about Sigma's words.

Indeed, by drawing from Subaru's memories, Echidna was able to recreate the town and the school from Subaru's original universe, none of which existed in this world. On the matter of having one's deepest memories tapped into, this concept would be personified by none other than Subaru, who had experienced it first-hand.

Subaru: "Right. I guess that makes sense. But the problem is... when Garfiel saw the scene of his parting with his mother again, why did it hurt him so much that he broke down crying?"

Sigma: "..."

Subaru: "It might sound harsh, but she left him when he was still very little, so he's spent far more time without his mother than with her. Getting stuck on something that's already long passed just doesn't sound like him at..."

Sigma: "Su-bo, do you really think a wound from being abandoned by your mother as a child could be so shallow?"

Pointing out to Subaru what he had trouble understanding, Sigma's words cut like a knife. Feeling his throat struck by those words, Subaru unwittingly fell silent. And, seeing this, Sigma lowered her grieving gaze.

Sigma: "Of course, his sister Frederica and I were aware of how large a thorn had been lodged into that child's heart. But Gar-bo might not have been aware of it himself until his Trial brought it to the surface... I think his excessive conservatism is precisely because of that."

Subaru: "...But, why? So that guy's rejection of liberating the Sanctuary and his fears of the outside world are all because of his negative feelings towards his mother... for choosing the outside world over him?"

Sigma: "It's more like hatred of the outside world. Hatred of the world that stole his mother but left him behind. And as much as he wanted to go after her, the barrier barred the rest of us from coming with him. Between his mother and the Sanctuary's residents, both of which are irreplaceable to him, it was far too cruel a choice."

Subaru: "Does he maybe hate his mother? The mother who deserted him and went into the outside world alone?"

For Subaru, who had never been abandoned by his parents, it was a pain he could not understand.

No matter how shamelessly he abandoned himself, no matter how worthless he showed them he was, they never once considered giving up on him. He was saved by that warmth, yet that same warmth tormented him even now.

Sigma: "Well, who could say..."

Sigma avoided giving an immediate answer. Her gaze wandered, as if in search of her words, before she spilled a small sigh.

Sigma: “I’ve never been able to ask him what he truly felt about his mother. I was a coward, after all. Every time I wanted to ask... I thought of that child crying in the Tomb, and I just couldn’t say the words.”

Subaru: “Sigma-san...”

Sigma: “And yet, even after that child learned of his past, he’d still say Garfiel Tinsel whenever he was asked for his name. My thinking is that surely, he does it so he does not forget.”

Subaru: “Doesn’t forget...”

Giving a nod to Subaru’s words, Sigma lovingly looked over the crummy shed that Garfiel, with his own hands, had worked so hard to build.

Sigma: “It’s so he doesn’t forget the emotion he felt when he saw his past— Whether it was anger, or grief, I’m not sure even now.”

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Otto: “You look terrible, Natsuki-san. You know that?”

Spotting Subaru in the center of the village, Otto called out with a wry smile. Hearing that unsparing remark, Subaru shrugged his shoulders and looked towards him.

Subaru: “I could say the same about you. It’s been half a day since I saw you and you are already covered in mud. Still tumbling around in woods at your age, aren’t you a bit old for that?”

Otto: “It’s not like I was trying to get covered in mud!”

Subaru: “Don’t shout, it’s rattling my sleep-deprived brain. Speaking of sleep deprivation, you’ve got some circles under your eyes as well. Frolicking in mud when you should be sleeping... Could it be that you are struck with the urge to rectify as many regrets as you can in the limited time you have left?”

Otto: “Could you stop sticking me with that kind of outdated popular-fiction plotline!?”

From Otto's objections, it sounds like this world has had its fad of fictions about terminally ill patients trying to live their last days to the fullest as well. Just more useless knowledge to add to the collection. In fact, once this is all over, it might be quite profitable to import all sorts of stories from his original world into this one. That said, Subaru continued,

Subaru: "Anyway, enough of joking around for now... How are things actually going?"

Otto: "I can't deny that it was a lot harder without your presence, Natsuki-san... But still, I think it's safe to call it a success. You can go ahead and praise me now."

Subaru: "Good job good job, you are my only hope, go for it!"

Otto: "What's with those uninspired encouragements! I can feel the air drying up!"

Watching Otto flap his arms up and down, Subaru secretly acknowledged his endless gratitude for his help. But since it'd be way too embarrassing to say it out loud, Subaru was determined to take that secret to his grave.

Subaru: "Well, good to hear those preparations are coming along. By the way, how are things progressing on the other front? Do you think it's amount to something?"

Otto: "That one... is a bit tricky with the limited timeframe that we have. There's simply not enough time. I guess if I cut into my sleeping hours, I might be able to manage it by the day after tomorrow, but..."

Subaru: "You'll cut into your sleeping hours for me? Your diligence leaves me speechless."

Otto: "Nnghaah! Can of worms...!"

Hugging his head, Otto lamented his slip of the tongue. But, even if Subaru hadn't insisted on it, Otto would probably still have chosen to forsake his sleep to make up for the needed time.

It was precisely because of this sincerity that Subaru trusted him as a friend.

Without ever realizing how thankful Subaru actually felt, with "So then.", Otto wiped off his anguished expression and turned to Subaru,

Otto: “Has the stage been set on your end, Natsuki-san? Honestly, considering the trouble with Emilia-sama, I’ve been wondering if I should be packing my bags and scuttling away in the night.”

Subaru: “I’m confident I can get all the missing pieces together. It’s still a bit worrying, though, not knowing what the final picture will look like.”

Otto: “A—are we going to be alright? There isn’t much time left...”

Subaru: “If I can’t fill in the pieces before the time limit, we’ll just have to make up for it with love, courage, and friendship. At least, going from the books I’ve read, it’ll definitely work out somehow.”

Otto: “You know, Natsuki-san. While I did say I was willing to go against the odds, that’s assuming there’s a fighting chance. Taking on a bet with zero chance of winning isn’t just idiotic, it’s more like courting death...”

Otto went on mumbling, but Subaru started walking without paying him much mind. Reluctantly, Otto followed and matched his steps.

Not feeling very concerned about dispelling Otto’s anxiety, Subaru headed towards the building where Roswaal was waiting— while not necessary, he thought he ought to update him on their progress thus far.

Having concluded his conversation with Ryuzu Sigma, Subaru had learned fragments of Garfiel’s past. Even though Sigma had no further information to give him, she did clarify her disinterest in the Sanctuary’s liberation, Garfiel’s rejection of his past, and the fact that she switched with Theta during the chaotic situation in the Tomb.

According to the replicants’ rotation schedule, Theta should show up tomorrow. What Theta saw in the Trial must have been the memories of Ryuzu Meyer’s interactions with Echidna, but just what could she have seen to make her so averse to liberating the Sanctuary?

Only by knowing this could he understand the reason for Theta’s obstinance. And, once he does, he could finally try to remove the existence that had been feeding Garfiel his instructions, and get a chance to talk to him without setting off his rage.

Despite Garfiel's rough and reckless facade, his nature wasn't irrational nor wholly inclined to violence. At least, that was Subaru's inkling. If he were irrational and approved of solving every problem with brute force, all he had to do was to simply eliminate everything that was a potential threat to the Sanctuary.

Without Puck at Emilia's side and considering Roswaal below his full capacity, no one present had the power to contend with a beastified Garfiel. He was now, without a doubt, the most powerful force within the Sanctuary, and were he to chose to bare his fangs and attack, he could have solved everything with violence alone.

Yet he didn't do this, precisely because, beneath the surface, his nature was still willing to search for a rational solution.

Subaru: "Basically, we are taking advantage of his softness to plot behind his back, huh. Almost makes us sound like the bad guys."

Otto: "I don't have a problem with using anything we can get our hands on, but I agree with the idea we are not exactly fairy tale protagonists here."

Picking up on Subaru's mutters, the self-professed Scoundrel B shrugged to his accomplice, Scoundrel A. Hearing this, Scoundrel A was sincerely gladdened by that sentiment from B.

In any case, Garfiel was the convergence point of the many problems surrounding the Sanctuary. If they could successfully persuade him, it would be the same as cleaning up Big Problem B. And as for Big Problem A, the Trial— or rather, Emilia.

Subaru: "I'll have to go see her one more time after this."

It was already well into the evening, and night-time lights were now illuminating the Sanctuary. The sun had sunken halfway down the western sky, coloring the world in a sunset hue of orange and violet. Night was approaching, and, assuming nothing happens, the time to challenge the Trial would soon arrive.

But Subaru had yet to hear any report of Emilia waking. Even in the case she was able to wake in time for the Trial, considering the time she would need in order to sort through her emotions, no doubt tonight's challenge was clearly a no-go. In fact, if worst comes to worst, she might even miss the challenge on Subaru's critical day tomorrow.

Even Puck, who served as the trigger of Emilia's collapse, spoke only of the extent of her initial shock, and hadn't said a peep on how long it would take for her to recover.

Subaru: "I know it depends on how well I support her after she wakes up, but... since I can't know how much damage she's taken, I can't help but feel like I'm just letting it lie."

Otto: "Do you think you'll be able to console her... or something to that effect? I'm just an outsider, so I can't really say anything."

Subaru: "For the moment, all I know is that she's so confused that she can barely recognize the people around her. It's the first time I've seen her throw a child-like tantrum like this. If you are asking me if I can do it or not... honestly, I can only try."

Otto: "So we are still walking on a tightrope, then..."

Hearing Subaru's unreliable answer, Otto sighed, but made no move to flee. Realizing that he was making Otto join him in his near-hopeless fight, Subaru genuinely wanted to apologize.

Nevertheless, the fact that Otto did not abandon him even now was truly a saving grace for Subaru.

Otto: "If that's the situation for Emilia-sama, how are things going with Garfiel? Have you acquired the bargaining material to soften him up a bit?"

Subaru: "I'm pretty sure I got the key piece we need, yeah. The problem is I'll still need some time before I can get him to the negotiation table."

How he deals with Garfiel will depend on how his conversation goes with Theta tomorrow. He would have to base his strategy upon whatever happens in his talk with her. As frustrating as it was, the only method available to his negotiations would be to repeat whatever information he had accumulated so far.

For now, there was no choice but to keep walking those tightropes one after the other.

Subaru: "—We are here. You are going in with me this time."

Subaru said to Otto beside him as they arrived in front of Roswaal's residence. Otto made an uncomfortable face at Subaru's words, but,

Otto: “Ehhh, well, alright. I guess there’s no reason for me stay outside this time. If I go in with you... Uwaaaaaagh, isn’t that the same as declaring war on the Margrave!? You sure my head will still be on my body after all this is over?”

Subaru: “Don’t worry. If your head goes flying, my head will go flying or get turned to rabbit food. I’m never gonna let you die alone!”

Otto: “There’s nothing reassuring about that at all!”

Seeing Subaru shoot him a thumbs up, Otto wailed in reply. And as they went on bantering outside the building’s doorway, the door opened from the inside— revealing a maid, casting them a cold stare.

Ram: “What are you two chattering about so loudly so late in the day, right outside the door? People will come to doubt your master, Roswaal-sama’s integrity. Conduct yourselves with more dignity.”

Subaru: “Sorry... But, what are you doing here? You left Emilia by herself?”

Apologizing to Ram’s scathing criticism, Subaru pointed out the strangeness of her presence. Giving a small sigh, Ram shrugged with feigned bafflement, and,

Ram: “You needn’t worry, I’m going back now. Since you were coming to visit, I was called here to help Roswaal-sama prepare— What a nuisance you are, placing this burden on Emilia-sama.”

Subaru: “Did you just spin that around so it’s my fault...? And what did Roswaal need to prepare for, anyway? He can’t get out of the bed, so there’s not much to be done, right?”

While Subaru knew that Roswaal was actually able to get out of bed, and was even healthy enough to kick Garfiel’s head to pieces, he was pretending he doesn’t know for now.

Seeing this, Ram squinted one of her eyes with an annoyed “Enough”, before walking right through the space between Subaru and Otto.

Ram: “Roswaal-sama is waiting, so hurry inside. Take care not to trouble Roswaal-sama by dragging the conversation on for too long... After you are done, promptly come take my place at Emilia’s side.”

Subaru: “Busy lady. I’m surprised you are so worried about Roswaal when he’s pretty much healthy right now. I still wish you could prioritize Emilia a bit more. If no one’s there once she wakes up, she...”

Ram: “The one she should find at her side when she wakes up cannot be Ram. Don’t you even understand that much?”

Walking away, Ram leaves a dumbstruck Subaru with that statement, her expression one of observing a genuine idiot. Silently watching her back as she left, Subaru felt Otto give him a light jab with his elbow.

Otto: “Unless you were intentionally trying to make her mad just now, that was a pretty terrible exchange, you know.”

Subaru: “...Yeah, I know. I was just wondering what her reaction would be.”

Otto: “You are rotten right down to the very core, you know that?”

Shoving Otto’s elbow away, Subaru went through the open door. Otto followed behind him, and together, they headed to the innermost room in the building. Lightly knocking on the door,

Subaru: “Roswaal, it’s me. Can I come in?”

Roswaal: “Ooooooooooya, you are here. Doooo come in, dooooooooooooo come in.”

The clown’s voice from beyond the door restored to its usual intonation slightly surprised Subaru as he opened the door. And---

Subaru: “Aah, so that’s what it was.”

Seeing Roswaal on the bed, Subaru faintly nodded as if understanding something. That must be the preparation Ram had mentioned.

At the comprehending Subaru’s side, Otto made a “Hgg” sound when he saw Roswaal’s face. It must be the first time he’s seen his face like this, after all.

Roswaal: “Taaaaking the time to come report on your proooooogress, how commendable. I am rather foooond of that part abooout you.”

Snickering in his clownish, drawn-out tone with the long-absent make-up back on his face, Roswaal spread out his arms, welcoming their arrival.

Arc 4 Chapter 97 - Before the Dawn

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 13, Chapter 4 “Lies, Liars, and Con Artists”, Parts 3-4

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#)

Roswaal: “Make yourselves at home. Whether it be a long conversation or a short conversation, we should get coooomfortable, no?”

Closing a single eye, Roswaal shot his yellow gaze towards the two standing at the door.

Tangled within that viscous gaze, Otto gulped as if drowning in its devilishness. Although the same demonic hand also reached for Subaru, having braced himself beforehand, by taking a single cough he managed to stand his ground without allowing himself to be swallowed.

Subaru: “You put on your makeup and got all dressed up just for us? I’m gonna blush.”

Roswaal: “Dooon’t worry about it. After all, you were the one who tooold me to put on my makeup agaaain.”

Subaru: “Ah right... I did.”

After sealing their Contract and bet, that was indeed what Subaru had told Roswaal before leaving the room. Though he never thought Roswaal would actually do it.

Roswaal: “You see, for me, these cosmetics are like my warpaint. To advance the world in accordance with the Gospel, I must never let down viiigilance. That’s why I wear this makeup, to constantly remiiind myself of that.”

Unexpectedly hearing this backstory, Subaru couldn’t help but gawk at Roswaal’s face.

The bewitching eyeliners on that white-powdered face. The red-painted lips and the peculiar shape around his left eye. Apparently, all of it had some significance other than screwing with his conversation partner.

Subaru: “Or, are you just saying that to screw with me?”

Roswaal: “You can beliiieve me, you know? Weeell, I’ll leave it to your imaginations. Since things have already diverged from the Gospel’s writ, I was ready to give up on this world and had stopped putting on my cosmetics... But now I’m wearing them once more. You can aaalso interpret that however you liiike.”

Listening to Roswaal’s roundabout words, Subaru gritted his teeth to keep his expression steady.

If it was indeed warpaint as Roswaal suggested, then the reason he put them on once more was clear. Chances were, it meant that he has regained his motivation and his will to live.

Even if his justification was his intention to bring this world to an end and leave everything to the self in the next world. Not unlike the hope Subaru himself once harbored.

Roswaal: “Would it have been better for you if I had continued wiiiithout motivation?”

Subaru: “Not really. We’ll still need your reputation, position, and influence to put Emilia-tan on the throne. It’ll be a problem if you suddenly start playing dead. So I’ll be crushing what motivation you have and making you see a different kind of hope before dragging you into our team.”

Roswaal: “Promising words... Feel free to tryyyyy it, if you can.”

Faced with Subaru’s brazen declaration of war, Roswaal’s lips twisted in delight. Then, keeping up that irritating smile, Roswaal turned to the one standing beside Subaru with an “Anyway”,

Roswaal: “This one spaaacing out next to you... must be the Otto-kun previously introduuuuced to me? Compared to how lively he was before, he’s looking awwwfully glum, iiisn’t he?”

Subaru: “He’s not gloomy, it’s more like he’s just freaking out. Just when he was hoping to do some bootlicking, he got to see a creepy clown face waiting for him. It’s only natural that he peed himself a little, right?”

Otto: “What are you doing suggesting that someone else peed themselves!? And don’t make it sound like I came here to shamelessly curry favor! You are making my impression even worse!”

Subaru: “The moment you decided to go against him and help me, any impression you might have caused was already the worst it could possibly be, you know. At least try establishing yourself as a formidable opponent so you can hope for a higher placing in the popularity polls.”

Otto: “I have precisely no idea what you are talking about!?”

Exchanging their rowdy banter as usual, Subaru could see Otto’s tension loosening. And, as if realizing that back and forth was meant to relax him, Otto’s face took on a complicated expression.

Watching the expressive gazes exchanged between the two, Roswaal held a finger to his cheek and gave a meaningful laugh.

Roswaal: “Conveying everything to each other through eyes alone, whaaat a great bond you twoooo must have. And when the relationship between Subaru-kun and I was supposed to have been longer, too. I’m kind of jeeeeeealous.”

Subaru: “Stop saying gross stuff. The number one and two places in my heart are already sold out. There’s absolutely no gap for you guys to... Especially for this asshole, to slip into, you asshole.”

Roswaal: “Unfortunate. But, doooesn’t that mean... there’s no place left for Beeeeeatrice? Just how do you feel about her?”

Subaru: “———”

No single word could have checked Subaru more effectively than that. He had never expected Roswaal to bring up Beatrice’s name here, so Subaru’s shock was as if he had just been slapped across the face.

Subaru: “Beatrice is...”

Roswaal: “That child follows her Gospel’s guidance. Iin that sense, you could say that we are rather like-miinded. Although, seeing how I am actively pursuing my Gospel’s writ, while she is passively keeping hers, there is a difference in our approooaches.”

Subaru: “You are saying if she can get results just by waiting, there’s no need to trouble herself? While I agree... in this case, the order for her to keep waiting is way too much of a curse.”

Roswaal: “That would perhaps beeeeeeeee the case here.”

On the instruction of her creator, Echidna, Beatrice had been waiting in the Forbidden Library inside Roswaal’s mansion for a person that does not exist. As a Spirit who was given this single purpose from the moment she was born, clinging mindlessly to this order was the only thing that gave her life meaning.

In terms of stubbornness, Beatrice is indeed very much like Roswaal.

Her pleas to be allowed to die remained vivid in Subaru’s memory, still. So did her expression at the very end, after all that had transpired in the mansion. That’s why—

Subaru: “I will undo that curse myself. I’ll drag her out of that stinking room and take her and her book and her dress out to dry in the sun— As for her feelings or whatever, I’ll leave that up to her.”

Roswaal: “———”

Listening to Subaru’s proclamation, Roswaal narrowed his eyes, as if looking at something dazzling. Then, he expelled a short sigh and turned his gaze to Otto, who had been waiting to join the conversation.

Roswaal: “Weeeell then? Seeing how you brought him here, and judging by that exchange between you two... Otto-kun would be the card you’ve been hiiiding?”

Otto: “N—no, I’m only here to arbitrate between the two sides. I would never have the gall to challenge your intentions, Margrave...”

Subaru: “Why are you backpedalling at this point! Just come out and say it! You are pissed off about his clown makeup and wanna paint it red and white *Kumadori*-style as soon as he’s defeated!”

Otto: “I don’t remember saying that! And what on earth is a *Kumadori*¹⁵³!”

¹⁵³ Translator note by SummaryAnon: “It’s Kabuki makeup”. For more information, see [here](#).

Sticking Otto with something that he didn't remember saying, Subaru shot him a pointless thumbs-up. But, watching Subaru from the side, Roswaal closed one of his eyes in thought before turning a meaningful gaze to Otto.

Roswaal: "My impression... is that Subaru-kun only managed to regain his confidence because of you. I'm sure that must've been a sight to behold."

Subaru: "I can't exactly deny that, but... Now that I think about it story-wise, isn't it kinda weird to recover thanks to a male character's help? Normally, shouldn't it be the heroine who gets me back on my feet?"

Otto: "Even if you look at me like that, I wouldn't know what to say to you!"

Subaru dismissed Otto's defiant gaze with a flap of his hand and accepted that there was no helping it. Having been lent the strength to stand up again, it was now Subaru's turn to take his heroine by the hand and pull her to her feet. At least, that was what his heart had decided to do.

Subaru closed his eyes and opened them once more. And, sensing a change in the sharpness of that gaze, Roswaal adjusted his posture on the bed as the atmosphere in the room shifted.

Upon the bed, Roswaal twined his fingers, with "Nooow then" as his opening salvo,

Roswaal: "When you are locked away in isolation for the sake of convalescence, you simply must find something to do. I couldn't help but get bored otherwise. And because of that... I've been keeping my ears very open."

Subaru: "Well ain't that a tasteless hobby."

Roswaal: "You may say that, but it looks like you've been making progress with those nefarious ploys of yours... How this Sanctuary came to be, and what complicated circumstances it's tangled in, have you gotten a little feel of those things yet?"

Subaru: "Yeah, with all the convoluted details going on, it's really a headache. If you add your problems and Emilia's Trials into the mix, «getting screwed on all sides» would be an understatement."

Subaru plainly admitted to the difficulty of his circumstances, but he had already taken his slim chances into consideration. Telling Roswaal the same thing he had told Otto, Subaru held up a single finger, indicating the lack of any intention to give up on his situation just yet,

Subaru: “The deadline for our Contract and bet is in three days. I intend to get things moving significantly tomorrow and the day after... So you better not get in the way too much.”

Roswaal: “Iiii’m afraid I must. Fulfilling the Gospel is my dearest wish. I thought I’ve already told you this many tiiiimes before?”

Subaru: “Within three days, I’ll have Emilia pass the Trials and convince Garfiel to join me. Strengthening our faction should not be a bad deal for you either. I can guarantee you my chosen future will be brighter compared to what relying on your Gospel will get you.”

Roswaal: “If it is as you say, perhaps that future has soooome merit after all.”

As futile as it was at this point, Subaru nevertheless made the attempt to persuade him. Suddenly, Roswaal looked down, muttering as if pondering over the future Subaru spoke of.

But, when he lifted his head once more, there was no more indecision in his mismatched eyes.

Roswaal: “Yet it isn’t certain— That is all the reason I need to reject your proposed future. If I obey my Gospel, my desired future is guaranteed. Even if it means making countless sacrifices to obtain it, what of it? After all, there is only one thing I desire.”

Subaru: “For the one thing most important to you, you would abandon everyone who is watching over you? Everyone who’s helping you... and Ram... What’ll become of them?”

Roswaal: “Noooooow now, that’s enough of that, Subaru-kun— What do you think quuuuestioning my resolve will achieve at this point? My answer remains unchanged, as are the tasks you must accomplish.”

Subaru: “———”

It was the anticipated outcome and rejection.

Roswaal had no intention of listening to Subaru. And just as Subaru rejected Roswaal’s proposal and Echidna’s Contract, Roswaal already had his optimal solution in mind.

Subaru: "...But you know, I'll never become you, Roswaal."

Roswaal: "Is that so... That is truly unfortunate, Subaru-kun."

Leaning his weight into the pillow at his back, Roswaal spilled a quiet sigh. His disappointment must be because of the expectations he had for Subaru—

—That, once all roads are cut, no doubt Natsuki Subaru would become just like him, fighting with all his life.

Otto: "We should return to the topic at hand. Is that alright with you, Margrave?"

Otto stepped forward and broke the silence that had descended upon the room. Roswaal turned his yellow gaze to the grey-haired youth and wordlessly assented. Then, Otto looked back at Subaru, who also nodded,

Otto: "It seems both sides have agreed on the deadline of three days for reshaping the circumstances of the Sanctuary. So even if the Margrave intends to influence Natsuki-san, it will amount to nothing more than quietly observing from the sidelines until then, correct?"

Roswaal: "Quietly observing... I don't recall making any promises of thaaaat sort?"

Otto: "And yet, the fact that you haven't burned me to cinders by now is an indication of that intention, right? I assume the Head Magician of the Kingdom of Lugunica's Court, Margrave Roswaal L. Mathers, would be able to incinerate me in the blink of an eye. Wouldn't that be the easiest, most straightforward method to foil Natsuki-san's plans while staying within the limitations of the bet?"

Roswaal: "Ooooooooooh?"

Subaru held his breath as he watched Otto build up his measured and fluent logic. Though they never rehearsed this beforehand, his delivery shot fire with every syllable. Even Roswaal looked surprised as he read the intention of Otto's words.

Roswaal: "You are an amusing one. Though I've given you a similar appraisal before... let me revise it— You are a rare talent, far more amusing than I thought."

Otto: "I humble myself with your praise, but... That was a compliment, right?"

Roswaal: "It is pure and unadulterated praise. Aahaaaaaa, how splendid. Standing there at Subaru-kun's side, you proved your argument at the peril of your own life. That is truly an admirable determination, very much to my liking. Not everyone could have done what you've just done."

Otto: "That's... Thank you."

Though somewhat overwhelmed by Roswaal's boldness, Otto nevertheless fearlessly faced him. As Otto himself had said, he was standing in front of a sorcerer who could incinerate him with the snap of a finger.

In fact, if Roswaal truly wanted to abandon all pretenses and enforce his Contract with Subaru, then all he had to do was resort to the treacherous methods Otto had described. And even if he didn't do that, but instead simply set fire to the Sanctuary or prematurely caused the snowfall to lure the Great Rabbit, there would be nothing Subaru could do to stop him. Subaru's bet would certainly be lost.

For Otto, who knew nothing about Return by Death, he had assumed that Subaru's survival was a necessary condition of the bet, but for Subaru and Roswaal, who did know about Return by Death, Subaru's survival was in fact irrelevant. As they sealed their Contract, that had been Subaru's greatest concern, whether Roswaal would burn him to death the moment he turned his back¹⁵⁴.

So what could it mean, if Roswaal would neither resort to violence nor simply watch from the sidelines?

Otto: "In any case, I'd like your assurance, Margrave. That regardless of what we plan or do... you will not take any extreme measures until the three days' deadline is up."

Roswaal: "Asking me for assurances, how audacious you are."

Otto: "I doubt we'd have a chance of winning this bet if we had to constantly watch our backs. And besides, if you are so sure that Natsuki-san will fail and that this bet is as good as won, then not doing anything to interfere shouldn't be a problem, should it?"

¹⁵⁴ In Arc 4 Chapter 67, we get this: "Roswaal knew that Subaru could rewind time, but he didn't know that it was through Return by Death, with death acting as the trigger". However, in this situation, Subaru seems to think that Roswaal could have torched his ass to win the bet easily, which is a bit of a plot hole. Either that or he forgot a very important detail, and is a gigantic dumbass. However, Summary did seem to be unsure if this paragraph was narrated from Subaru's point of view or from Tappei's omniscient point of view.

Roswaal: “———”

Gesturing with his body alongside his words, the corners of Otto’s mouth rose as he spoke. Seeing this, Roswaal’s gaze sharpened. Swallowing his breath while watching the negotiations, Subaru could sense that the critical moment had arrived. If Roswaal simply accepted Otto’s provocation, they would lose.

A heavy, breathtaking silence descended upon the room. However,

Roswaal: “liiiiii see. Subaru-kun, you are blessed to have such a woooooonderful friend.”

Subaru: “...Yeah, you are right. He’s the kind of buddy who’ll give me a good beating when I go astray, you know.”

Answering the grinning Roswaal, Subaru’s gaze was looking somewhere far away.

Then suddenly, he realized it. Roswaal probably never had a friend like Otto. When Subaru was about to go down the very same path, Otto’s punches brought him back again. Most likely, Roswaal had no one around to correct his stubborn and twisted ideas like that.

Subaru: “No helping it, then—— It’s four-hundred years late, but we’ll be doing that now.”

Roswaal: “———”

Subaru: “Roswaal! Safe to call that attitude from before agreement, right!”

Roswaal wryly smiled at Subaru’s pursuit, then tilted his clownish face,

Roswaal: “Very well, I’ll promise. Either way, I’ll need to store up my Mana for the snowfall in three days. Just so you know, even for someone as poooooweful as me, it is a strenuous effort to controoooool the weather. Even if only temporarily, and in a confiiiiined area.”

Subaru: “So then, you’ll spend your time meditating from now on? Just for reference, if you can tell me what annoys you the most when you are meditating, that’ll help a lot.”

Roswaal: “liiii’m not in the habit of being so charitable to my enemies—— In any case, there is no need for me to do anything, since I knooooow that your plans will not succeed.”

No concessions to be had on that one, apparently.

Subaru snorted at those taunting words, while Otto sighed with an exhausted expression. Nevertheless, they have safely secured their biggest goal in coming here.

While they throw everything into the bet, Roswaal will not do anything to interfere. Getting that assurance alone was a triumph. And the fact that Otto's oration proved even more effective than anything they could've planned was huge.

Roswaal: "Incidentally, Subaru-kun."

Subaru: "—Ah?"

Roswaal: "I hear that the Great Spirit-sama has leeeeft Emilia-sama's side?"

That change of topic came like a punch from above just when Subaru's mind began to relax. Straightening his back, Subaru acknowledged Roswaal's question with "Yeah",

Subaru: "Something happened with Emilia and Puck's Contract and their link's been severed. Right now, Emilia can't be called a Spiritual Arts User anymore."

Roswaal: "I also heard that she's terribly aggrieved... With matters as precarious as they are, for her heart to receive such a wound now, will it really be alright?"

Subaru: "...Who knows. At least, tonight's Trial has gone out the window. As for how that'll affect things tomorrow and onwards, we won't know until Emilia wakes up."

The truth is, even though Puck had warned him beforehand of how anguished Emilia would be, her sorrow was such that he still couldn't help but want to cover his eyes. With just two days remaining, cornering Emilia like this had made his slim chances even slimmer, closing off the gates of success.

But as long as some wind blows through the hole in the supposedly-shut gate, Subaru will keep his present, faint hope.

Subaru: "That said, it really is a headache. But, one way or another, I..."

Roswaal: "That's, rather intriiiiiguing..."

Interrupting Subaru's words, Roswaal wagged his lifted finger left and right. Subaru unwittingly fell silent at this gesture, while Roswaal continued.

Roswaal: "After all, while you do seem troubled about how to get Emilia-sama back on her feet... you don't appear to be at all surprised by the fact the Great Spirit-sama broke his coooooontract with Emilia-sama. Just why would thaaaaaat be?"

Subaru: "———"

Roswaal's nonchalant question made Subaru instantly lose his words.

Subaru didn't seem surprised because Subaru already knew it was going to happen. If he hadn't discussed it with Puck beforehand, he would probably have been helplessly paralyzed in front of the screaming and wailing Emilia. That said, that's not exactly a huge difference from what actually happened.

Roswaal: "Did you... perhaps know about this situation beforehand? The fact that the Great Spirit-sama would leave Emilia-sama's side? Leaving aside the manner of how you came to leeeeeearn of it."

Subaru: "Even if, hypothetically, I did... it'd make no sense for you to complain about it. I'm just doing everything I can to win this bet. So even if you..."

Roswaal: "Nooooono, that's enough— That's all I needed to hear."

Roswall held up his palm with a satisfied nod. At this, Subaru stopped mid-sentence, expelling a rueful snort through his nostrils.

Roswaal: "liiiin any case... If the Great Spirit-sama has indeed left Emilia-sama's side, thaaaaat would present something of a proooooblem for me."

Subaru: "...Really? Considering your objectives, shouldn't this be a turn for the b..."

Roswaal: "Not at all. If the unbearable sight of Emilia-sama breaking could set your heart aflame, that would indeed be suitable for my needs... But if Emilia-sama loses her powers as a Spiritual Arts User, then she cannot be the culprit behind the snowfall upon the Saaaaanctuary. That would be a heeeeeeavy blow to me."

Subaru: "Ah..."

Roswaal was talking about the Gospel's discrepancy with reality.

In three days, the snowfall in Sanctuary will draw the Great Rabbit here. In order to match the content of the writ, Roswaal would have to bury the Sanctuary in snow. But, that means—

Subaru: “Roswaal, I’ve been thinking this for a while now...”

Roswaal: “Hm? Whaaaaaat is it?”

Subaru: “About how this perfect Gospel of yours also has its failings.”

Roswaal: “———”

The thin smile on Roswaal's lips disappeared at Subaru's words. The air dried up and goosebumps rose on Subaru's skin as he felt the warlock's gaze upon him. At his side, Otto shriveled his shoulders, and for a moment, Subaru felt his throat being choked by the pressure. All the while, the warlock focused his mismatched pupils on Subaru.

Roswaal: “Go on, Subaru-kun. About these failings of the Gospel... thaaaaaat you mentioned.”

Reaching into the pillow at his back, Roswaal produced a book with black binding— the Gospel. Just like the one belonging to Beatrice in the Forbidden Library, its mere appearance burdened the atmosphere with a strange and oppressive heaviness.

Subaru: “T—there's always... been something off about the way you talked about the Gospel's writ. Since I had too much on my plate, I never really gave it much thought... But now that I had a chance to settle down and think about it... I noticed something.”

Roswaal: “Well, let's hear it?”

Subaru: “The Gospels that the Witch Cultists have... are incomplete and not very reader-friendly, but leaving that aside for now, there's also a decisive flaw about the Gospel that you have.”

Roswaal: “———”

Roswaal's brows twitched as he heard that word, "flaw". That he nevertheless remains silent is maybe because he holds unending interest in what Subaru is talking about. Roswaal's Gospel was literally the lifeline feeding his goals. He had no reason not to listen when he hears words like "failing" and "flaw".

Taking a small breath, with his intestines trembling from the pressure clogging his throat, Subaru focused his glare onto Roswaal and spoke.

Subaru: "Going by what you said, it sounds like the Gospel has described the chains of events that would take place in the Sanctuary right up to the end. In your mind, this means a route where I conquer the Tomb in place of Emilia, who fails to beat it, comes to fruition. To corner Emilia and make sure she fails, you'll bring snowfall upon the Sanctuary, luring the Great Rabbit here. Meanwhile, you push the mansion into an impossible situation to force me to steel my resolve and let go of the useless parts of me— Is that right?"

Roswaal: "More or less, thaaaat's correct. And the defect?"

Subaru: "...You didn't know that the snowfall will bring the Great Rabbit here. Which means your Gospel didn't mention what the result of bringing the snowfall will be. So if all it says is «it will snow», and you take it as your creed and move to make it reality— then you are really just the book's puppet."

Roswaal: "I am aware. Even so, I don't mind. As long as I follow this book, I will receive the future I desire. As such, why should I hesitate to dance to its heartless and formless words?"

Calmly, Roswaal confirmed Subaru's reasoning.

Subaru's eyes wavered, unsure of what he should say next. But now that his reasoning had been confirmed, it brought a definite sense of reality to the hypothesis in his mind— And if his hypothesis was correct, then,

Subaru: "We really are both clowns."

Roswaal: "—Oh?"

Roswaal narrowed his eyes as the room's atmosphere thickened. Subaru's sensation of his body temperature dropping must be because of the warlock's waves of quiet emotion displacing the Mana in the atmosphere.

Regardless, even if it meant irking Roswaal, addressing the problem of the Gospel was necessary. Both to dispel Subaru's doubts—and to cast doubt into Roswaal's obstinate heart.

Subaru: "Back to the point. If the Gospel's record states that it will snow, I would assume this was originally supposed to be done by Emilia. But since Emilia couldn't, or otherwise wouldn't, you must cause the snowfall in her place. In order to follow the Gospel's writ."

Roswaal: "You are repeating yourself. Hasten to the conclusion. Where is the failing, the defect in..."

Subaru: "Basically, if Emilia wasn't able to cause the snowfall, and if the Gospel telling you to cause the snowfall did not instruct you so... it would never snow in the Sanctuary."

That would be the simple conclusion.

Roswaal was only going to cause the snowfall because the Gospel said it would happen. So had it never been written in the Gospel, or if the Gospel never existed, then Roswaal would have had no reason to take such an action.

It was unclear why Emilia would bring snow to the Sanctuary in the first place, but if the Gospel was correct, Emilia would need to have some reason or another to cover the Sanctuary in snow. Without knowing what that reason may be, the snowfall itself is pointless. Not to mention this development would not occur if the Gospel simply never existed—

Subaru: "Prophecies that wouldn't come true unless prophesied— What kind of prophecies are those?"

Roswaal: "———"

Subaru: "Prophecies are supposed to predict events no matter how unbelievable or seemingly impossible they are. The imperfect ones the Witch Cultists get updated as things unfold to match the progression of the world. But what about your Gospel? The one crowned with the splendid designation of «perfect»?"

Roswaal: "———"

Subaru: "If you need to bend the world just to make sure things match its contents, what's the point? If you are the one who must make it happen at the expense of absolutely everything else, how do you know it was supposed to happen in the first place? Smart as you are, you must have noticed it?"

Roswaal: “———”

Subaru: “You are just in denial, Roswaal.”

Subaru jabbed out his finger and declared.

Showered by those words, Roswaal didn’t say a word. But the pressure encasing the room had disappeared, while Otto, released from its hold, drew quick short breaths to settle the pounding of his heart.

Closing both eyes, Roswaal sank into thoughtful silence. Subaru thought he saw a slight twitch in Roswaal’s red-painted lips, but it may have been wishful thinking in the hopes that his words had swayed him. However, he would be given no time to confirm this.

Roswaal: “History... presumes the existence of the prophecy... of the gospel. It heeds that there is someone... who will act exactly according to the gospel’s writ as it progresses, that is the natural conclusion...”

Subaru: “Yeah. I knew you’d make that kind of rebuttal— So I’ve prepared a rebuttal to that as well.”

In front of Roswaal’s uncharacteristically faltering speech, Subaru cut him off, having already expected this reaction beforehand.

Closing a single eye, Roswaal peered his yellow pupil into Subaru, emitting the same eerie gleam he had poured onto Subaru so many times before. But this may have been the faintest Subaru had ever seen of that gleam.

Vaguely noticing this, Subaru continued.

Subaru: “Show me your Gospel. If I could see what sort of entries are written in it, I’ll agree with you.”

Roswaal: “——Guh. I’m afraid that is impossible. The Gospel would never reveal its contents to anyone other than its recognized owner. I am the owner of this Gospel. Even should you see it, you would not be able to understand the text, and there is even possibility for the mind of those not recognized by the Gospel to be scorched should they touch it...”

Subaru: “You are getting awfully talkative, Roswaal. Is it really so much of a problem for you if I see the book?”

Seeing Roswaal getting stuck for words, Subaru’s eyes widened in surprise.

Though the white cosmetics kept the color of his face from showing through, Roswaal’s refusal was so intense that it could be called an overreaction. This rapid shift in Roswaal’s attitude told Subaru that he had cornered him even more than he had imagined.

There was something in the Gospel’s text that Roswaal was hiding, that he couldn’t allow anyone else to know. Was his stubborn adherence to its prophecies originally spurred by that hidden something?

If not, then how could someone like Roswaal have failed to notice the contradictions within the Gospel?

Otto: “Natsuki-san, any further would be...”

Sensing the shift in Roswaal’s attitude and judging it was time to drive the point home, Subaru was suddenly stopped by Otto, who had been quietly observing them. Subaru looked back, intending to reject Otto’s advice, but when he saw the seriousness of Otto’s gaze, he was dissuaded from pushing the matter further.

Otto saw something that he, in his passion, had failed to see. And those eyes were clearly telling him that it was time to bring this conversation to an end. Recklessly forcing the issue now would only ruin everything they’ve gained here.

Subaru: “—Roswaal, there’s three days left. Tomorrow, and the day after. And, the final day. We’ll put an end to everything before then. You just sit tight and think about what I said.”

Roswaal: “Are you thinking to put me in your debt, I wonder? —You should thank Otto-kun, your friend. He avoided a watershed which would have been unfavorable for both of us.”

With his face still devoid of emotion, Roswaal hid the Gospel behind his back once more. Then, as if to put in his final word as Subaru and Otto turned towards the door with a shrug,

Roswaal: “I will now begin preparing for my weather manipulation spell. And I will consecrate the Gospel’s writ into reality— Doing so is my only guiding compass.”

Subaru: “Do whatever you want. Go ahead and stubbornly cling to it if you like...”

With his hand on the doorknob, Subaru turned around, taking Roswaal into his view. And, when his gaze met the warlock’s,

Subaru: “Once all this is over, I’ll dip that Gospel of yours in ink until it’s all ruined and black— And then you’ll finally be able to see in front of you with your own damn eyes.”

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—Having concluded their conversation with Roswaal, though it was hard to say whether it was meaningful or not, Subaru parted with Otto and headed to Emilia’s residence.

Ram: “—You are here, Barusu.”

Subaru: “Yeah, I’m here. Sorry for troubling you with this for so long.”

Seeing Subaru enter the room, Ram, who had been watching over Emilia, turned him a listless expression. While this kind of lackluster expression was quite usual for her, Subaru thought he caught a glimpse of something darker from the side of her face, though he might be just imagining it.

Subaru: “We are done talking with Roswaal. I’ll watch over Emilia now, so you can go.”

Without delving into the topic, Subaru pulled up a chair next to Ram where he could watch over Emilia. Ram gave Subaru a glance as he sat down beside her, and,

Ram: “It’s worrying, wondering whether Barusu will do something filthy to Emilia-sama while she’s sleeping.”

Subaru: “I didn’t wanna think your faith in me is so low that you’d suspect me of doing something inappropriate in this situation, you know.”

Ram: “Why would I trust you? You’ve revolted against Roswaal-sama, your master, and raised your banner against him in the confined space of this Sanctuary.”

Subaru: "..."

It was rather obvious, but it seems Ram knew about the Contract between Subaru and Roswaal, as well as the details of their bet.

After all, this was Ram, Roswaal's loyal servant to whom she was willing to devote everything to the very, very end. Even if, to Roswaal, she was just a pawn for actualizing the Gospel's writ and the only person he could use without suspicion.

Subaru: "And, what do you think?"

Ram: "———"

Ram did not reply to that question without a subject. She only turned her body towards Subaru, waiting for him to continue, while Subaru sorted through his emotions and chose his words,

Subaru: "I'm not sure how much you know about the Gospel's contents. But, if Roswaal makes those contents reality, the Sanctuary will be in ruins. We won't know if Garfiel or Ryuzu-san or anyone else will safely..."

Ram: "If you think that's going to persuade me, then you are far too shallow, Barusu."

Sternly cutting him off, Ram reflected Subaru within her pale-red eyes, piercing him with her unwavering gaze.

Ram: "There is only one precious person occupying the highest place in my heart. That fact will never waver. Nothing could ever sway that position. Do not expect such words to change my mind."

Subaru: "..."

Ram: "Besides—— Ram's problems are already entrusted elsewhere."

While Subaru regretted his poor choice of words, Ram quietly muttered. Subaru looked up as he heard this, intending to ask her what she meant, but Ram stood up before he could. Smoothing out her skirt, Ram took one last look at the sleeping Emilia before turning back to Subaru,

Ram: "I'll leave Emilia-sama to you. I will visit again in the morning to wait on her."

Subaru: “Y—yeah... Alright. Um, what did you mean just n...”

Ram: “...Well, who knows.”

Giving the most “I’m not going to answer” kind of answer as her reply, Ram left the room. As much as he wanted to call out to her, Subaru couldn’t think of what to say and only watched her as she left.

She closed the door behind her, leaving Subaru and Emilia alone in the room.

As Emilia was still asleep in her bed, all that was left for Subaru to do was watch over her in her slumber. It’s been some ten hours since Subaru held the disoriented, wailing Emilia until she practically slipped out of consciousness— The only relief was that Emilia’s expression seemed untroubled by nightmares as she slept.

If her past hounded her even into her dreams, then her heart would truly lose its final refuge.

The moment she wakes, she would once again be faced with the fact that her bond with Puck had been cut. Just how much time would she need before she could come to terms with that?

Subaru didn’t know how much his presence could help to alleviate that pain. And though, without a doubt, he wanted to be her strength— just how much would he amount to?

Emilia: “...Ru.”

Subaru: “—Huh?”

Submerged in that sea of thought, suddenly, Subaru’s consciousness picked up a faint call. Looking over, he saw Emilia’s head softly tilting with her open amethyst eyes gazing at him— She was awake.

Subaru: “You are, up... Emilia, are you alright?”

Emilia: “—Subaru.”

Subaru: “Yeah, it’s me. How are you feeling? You’ve been asleep for... Hold on, I’ll bring some water.”

Emilia: “It’s fine.”

Subaru stood up, intending to rush outside, but Emilia’s call stopped him.

Startled by the surprising forcefulness of her words, Subaru unwittingly sat back into his chair.

Subaru: "...Emilia?"

Emilia: "It's fine. I'm okay... Stay here."

Subaru lowered his voice, and Emilia gave her firm reply.

The events over the past few days had led Subaru to believe that Emilia would be light-headed and fragile in the mornings. After waking, her mind would usually need some time to recover, especially after such a prolonged slumber— yet Emilia's amethyst eyes did not give the slightest indication of that fatigue.

Subaru: "Do you... know what happened?"

Emilia: "...Mm. I slept for the whole day today. Even though everybody has been waiting for me, what am I doing... I'm sorry."

Subaru: "That's...! No one is going to fault you for that. What I meant was..."

Facing the apologizing Emilia, Subaru was at a loss as to whether to bring up Puck. It should've been the first topic to come to mind as she recovered her bearings after waking. But instead of that, her only concern was for everyone else's sake. Unless, could it be that the shock was so great that she forgot that her Contract with Puck was broken—

Emilia: "Don't worry, Subaru."

Subaru: "Uh, eh...?"

Emilia: "I haven't... forgotten that Puck is gone. I remember. I'm not going to forget that and run away."

Subaru: "You, won't...?"

Emilia: "Mm..."

Emilia gave a small nod, and Subaru realized that Emilia hadn't forgotten that fact. But, in that case, why was Emilia's expression so calm right now?

For Subaru, who had seen Emilia's state immediately after she learned that she had lost Puck, seeing her calmness now felt almost surreal. But, while Subaru was having trouble accepting that it was as simple as it seemed,

Emilia: "I'm sorry, Subaru. I showed you so many unsightly sides of myself... You must be reeaally worried."

Subaru: "No, you can worry me as much as you want. I don't mind. I don't, but... right now, you are the one t..."

Emilia: "—There were lots. Of things I thought about. They happened... in the dream."

Emilia quietly interrupted Subaru's tangled words. In front of her downcast eyes, Subaru inadvertently swallowed his breath without looking away. He saw her long eyelashes quiver as she looked back at him once more,

Emilia: "I'll definitely be fine in the morning... I want to believe that, so... Subaru, please."

Subaru: "...Ah, mhm."

Emilia: "Hold my hand. Can you please stay here until the morning? If you do, then I'll definitely..."

Emilia's white fingertips timidly reached out from under the sheets. Seeing that offered hand, Subaru immediately gripped it in his own, wrapping her delicate, silken fingers firmly in his palms,

Subaru: "If that's all you need, then it's no problem at all. But, Emilia..."

Emilia: "I'm sorry, Subaru. I know there must be lots of things you want to say and ask about. But... please, wait for morning. Because then, I can do my best."

Subaru: "——"

Emilia: "So please, just stay like this until it's morning— Subaru."

Faced with Emilia's near-pleading voice, Subaru had nothing more to say. He merely brought his chair closer to the bed and placed her enveloped hand beside her pillow. Having done so, he nodded to Emilia, who was watching him with her wavering eyes,



Subaru: “Understood. I will, Emilia.”

Emilia: “Mm... Thank you.”

With that short exchange, Emilia’s eyes closed once more. Unlike her swooning loss of consciousness that morning, this time, she was falling into restful, self-willed sleep. When she wakes from it again, just what would he say to her then?

By her own strength, Emilia had conquered the worst of what Subaru had envisioned. Thoroughly relieved by this fact, Subaru watched over Emilia’s sleeping visage.

Emilia: “...I trust you.”

Suddenly hearing Emilia’s half-asleep mutter, Subaru let slip a small sigh.

—The situation will start moving again come morning.

That fateful morning was only hours away. And—

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Ram: “Did anything come of the conversation with Barusu?”

Roswaal: “A painful tie... would be an apt description. It seems both him and I had our gains and compromises. Though, I had planned to avoid interfering in the first place.”

In the dark room, the master and servant conversed at a distance closer than necessary. Holding Ram close at his bedside with her head resting on his chest, Roswaal reminisced on the conversation earlier.

The fact is, it would be no easy task to sway Subaru once he had hardened his resolve. Although it was unclear what Subaru’s future would hold, Roswaal could clearly sense the iron will at its core.

Otto’s presence at his side also caused no small problems for Roswaal. By objectively grasping the situation and effectively reining in Subaru when he did, Otto perfectly fulfilled his role as a force of

balance by keeping both Subaru and Roswaal from going too far. Had Otto not been present, Roswaal could very well have twisted Subaru's thinking through persuasion alone---

Roswaal: "He looked like a spectator who'd never take the stage... but he was surpriiisingly cunning and caaaapable. Subaru-kun has found himself a wonderful friend."

Ram: "...If he's getting in the way, would you like me to do something about it?"

Roswaal: "No need. If I was going to make that decision, I should've made it during that conversation. Once I missed that chance, I've lost my excuse anyway. More importantly... About my request?"

Closing a single eye, Roswaal looked down at Ram through his yellow pupil. In her master's arm and embrace, Ram shook her head, looking up from his chest,

Ram: "Without complications. I've delivered it as you wished, Roswaal-sama."

Roswaal: "I see. I'd hoped that the timing would align... What will happen now, I wonder."

Hearing Ram's affirmation, Roswaal gave a satisfied nod and patted the girl's head with his palm while Ram accepted it with an expression of intoxication and entrancement. For an instant, Roswaal's gaze towards the adoring girl in his arms was almost one of pity.

Roswaal: "Don't think badly of me, Subaru-kun. I did promise not to interfere directly. I did, but... I should at least be allowed to cause some mischief from the comfort of my bed liiiiiiike this?"

Ram: "----"

Roswaal: "Now just what will happen..."

An elated smile crept onto Roswaal's lips.

Roswaal: "When he learns that that virtue-loving girl had heard that insidious conversation and all its underhanded plotting... just what will Subaru-kun's face looooooooooooooooook like?"

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—The room was dark.

With all the lights extinguished, the room had fallen into darkness and would remain abundant in the tracks of dreams and night until the arrival of dawn beyond the window.

The closed door separated this room from the rest of the world, preserving this silent space within. There, amid the darkness, stood a bed in the center of the room, and on it, lay a girl with closed eyes.

When the silence devoid of even the sleeper's breathing— was broken by a sound.

???: "...Liar."

A weak and hazy whisper. An all too minuscule complaint from the lips of the girl on the bed.

???: "Subaru, you liar."

Again, the murmur repeated.

Clenching her empty hand, left all alone in the room, Emilia denounced the lies of the boy who wasn't there.

—The arrival of the fateful morning was only a few hours away.

Arc 4 Chapter 98 - A Bed Lost of Warmth

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 13, Chapter 4 “Lies, Liars, and Con Artists”, Part 5 (loosely adapted)

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken – [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

—Whenever she closed her eyes, the memories would come back vivid, even now.

White. A world of white.

Waking, exhaling puffs of white, young Emilia found herself within a snowscape.

“Why”, asked her heart. But no answer came.

There was no memory before this, and her consciousness was hazy.

Getting out of bed, she ran to see the scene outside the window. Her familiar village amid the lush green forests was now completely covered in the freezing, world-ending white.

Since it was the first time Emilia had ever seen snow, she didn’t even recognize that this was the phenomenon called snow. But the vivid instincts of cold and fear nevertheless seared the image into her young memory.

Still without knowing what was happening, Emilia tensed her cheeks and tightened her throat as she broke into a run. The moment she dashed out of the old house built within the great, hollow tree, her body was cut through by the frigid wind as piercing cold stabbed her soles like knives in her baptism by ice.

The snow immediately grabbed her foot as she tumbled face-first into the ground. A freezing embrace of white, powdery, crystallized snow. The very first contact with those icy flakes instilled horror into the young Emilia. They were so astoundingly beautiful, yet so horrifyingly cold.

Her simple garments were no better than a thin cloth around her body against the frigid chill and her body began trembling to the core from both cold and terror. The snow pillaged her body's warmth as the white crystals tore away at her heart. But Emilia, groaning as she swiped away the snow, began running once more.

Falling snowflakes danced endlessly from the sky. Looking up as she panted, flakes of snow stuck to the back of her throat. She coughed it away as she ran, tears trailing down the sides of her cheeks.

She didn't know why she was crying.

She was scared. She was afraid. Why was she here alone? Where did everyone else go? Everyone who was kind to her, who smiled at her, and who would offer her their hand, where did they all go?

She tried to remember their faces, but something clogged up her thoughts. The faces of everyone in her mind— Their faces, their smiles, were painted over by black shadows as if depriving them of their very existence in her brain.


Emilia: “———Hk.”

Shaking her head frantically, tears poured down her face as she ran.

She mustn't think. If she thinks about them, those black shadows will consume them. Everyone precious to her will disappear from her mind.

But if she doesn't think about them, she will be all alone. In a cold, impenetrable world of white, alone— This was a terror the young Emilia could not bear. Powerless and ignorant, the only thing young Emilia could do in the world-ending white was struggle.

But as if mocking her futile struggles, the falling snow wrapped around her until her tiny body sank into its inevitable, pure-white abyss.

—There's no one here. There's no one in sight. Now, she couldn't even  everyone anymore.

Emilia: “—No!!”

Trapped in this white world, her limbs growing numb and unmoving, Emilia fell to the ground crying like a newborn. Her knees sank into the tender snow, and though it should have been cold, she could not feel the cold at all. Her skin so often called “white as snow” now burned pure red in the cold of true snow.

Just like that, running from everything, Emilia hugged her head as she sank into the snow.

Falling snow mercilessly piled upon the little girl as Emilia’s small body disappeared into the white—

???: “—Emilia!!”

As she closed her eyes, falling into wakeless sleep, a scream tearing through the silence woke her.

Forcing open her long-lashed eyelids, Emilia sprang up. And instantly, her lightweight body was pulled out of the snow and into an embrace.

Emilia: “———Ah.”

???: “You are okay, Emilia. It’s okay, everything’s okay. Thank goodness... I’ve found you...”

She wanted to speak, but her throat, frozen by the absolute cold, only managed a groan. However, understanding Emilia’s condition, the person only held the young Emilia in their embrace, their voice trembling with joy at her safety.

Emilia, her nose red and sniffing, rubbed her face against the person’s short silver hair, trying to communicate her emotion through her entire body. Conveying through action that, just like the boundless love directed towards her, she felt exactly the same in return.

This happiness again, of being cradled in their arms, and to speak there with them.

In the white, despairing snow that made little Emilia wonder if everything was over, that warmth certainly existed here and now.

Still hugging Emilia, shivering from both joy and cold, the woman with short silver hair looked around her as her relieved expression tensed and she started to run. She drew her lips next to Emilia’s ear in her arms, exhaling breaths of white,

???: “Emilia, can you hear me? I know you are worried, and I know you don’t understand, but... Everything is alright. One way or another, I’ll make it alright. Even if we get separated here, I will never leave you alone...”

Emilia could not understand those resolute words, but just the thought of being separated from the person before her eyes filled her with dread. Her numb fingers grasped the woman’s collar, her eyes teared as she frantically shook her head.

For the young, ignorant Emilia, appealing to the other’s emotion was all she could think to do. For as long as she did this, Emilia had been loved and adored by all those around her. It had always been this way. So here at this junction, or from this moment forth—

Emilia: “———!”

???: “No, you must not do that, Emilia. Even if it was fine up until now, you mustn’t do this anymore. You must become a strong, smart, and brave girl. Unless you do, you won’t be able to accept yourself, and you’ll inevitably meet a tragic end. And that will make me... my brother, and everyone, very, very sad.”

Emilia: “———Guh.”

She desperately shook her head.

Nevertheless, the woman heartlessly disregarded her appeals. Telling her she mustn’t do this, she rebuked Emilia’s reliance on others.

Emilia couldn’t believe it. Of course she would find it painful.

Even when she was told she couldn’t, one way or another, she would always have gotten her way in the end. But why wasn’t it working this time?

Why must it start failing now, when she was facing the most painful, difficult, and frightening moment of her life? If there was a more correct way of doing this, how come no one ever told her about it? —She was starting to resent everyone.

Emilia: “———!”


???: “I’m sorry, Emilia. I’m so sorry. For never teaching you even a single important thing, for hiding everything from you... For letting you remain an adorable little princess, please forgive me... Forgive us...”

—I don’t want to forgive. Don’t want to forgive. Don’t want to forgive. Don’t want to forgive. Don’t want to forgive. Don’t want to forgive. Don’t want to forgive. Don’t want to forgive.

???: “Everyone around you who cherished your smile, and the gentle lies they told... Please don’t hate them...”

—Hate them. I hate them. I hate them. I hate them. I hate them. I hate them. I hate them. I hate them. I hate them.

Emilia: “———”

She hated lies. She detested lies. Lies only lead to sadness. Lies were the reason everything turned upside down. Lies were what left Emilia alone. And so, she detested lies. Because she hated lies. Because she hated liars. Everyone is just a stupid .

???: “Our beloved Emilia... Someday, you’ll...”

Emilia: “———!”

Emilia let out a wordless scream. She didn’t want to hear any more. No matter what she hears, it wouldn’t change a thing. The howling gale and Emilia’s shriek drowned out the woman’s final words from this world.

The silver-haired woman looked sadly at Emilia’s rejection and her violent struggle in her arms, but casting all emotions aside, she faced forward once more—

???: “—Ah.”

—That was when the true end arrived.

The woman running with Emilia in her arms caught sight of the presence before her and stopped. Prompted by that faint jolt, Emilia looked up, and at the top of her vision she saw the face of the woman holding her, looking more tense than Emilia had ever seen.

In her expression was surprise and sorrow, rage and grief, disgust and awe— and even a tinge of relief.

Battering at Emilia's cheeks, the cold, white gale intensified. In a blizzard so strong that even opening her eyes was difficult, overwhelmed by terror, Emilia held her near-frozen ears and screamed.

And—

And—

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The morning of the fifth day at the Sanctuary— the vital day that would determine whether Natsuki Subaru will break through this loop, opened with the worst possible news.

Ram: “Barusu— Where did Emilia-sama go?”

Subaru: “—Huh?”

After washing his face at the pond and wiping down his body with a wet cloth, only to see Ram unabashedly appear amidst the throng of half-naked men, Subaru answered her question with a stupid groan.

It was slightly after sunrise, around what would have been eight o'clock in his original world. Waking up one after another, the men among the residents and refugees gathered around the pond to wash away their sweat from the night.

And then, brazenly barging into the men's washing area, the first thing out of Ram's mouth was the question concerning Emilia's whereabouts. Seeing a woman show up like it was a matter of course, some of the men hurriedly scuttled away in shame, but Subaru had no time to tease them for it.

After all, he couldn't understand what she meant at all.

Subaru: "Emilia... What are you talking about?"

Ram: "Just what it sounds like. When I went to Emilia-sama's room to wait on her, there was no one there. I thought she might be with you, Barusu..."

Subaru: "No one's there... How's that possible? I mean, I made sure to say good morning to her when she woke up before I left... and I came here after that."

Unable to hide his shock at what Ram had just told him, Subaru thought back to the events of that morning.

He had held her hand through the night just as she had asked, and when Emilia woke in the morning and saw him watching over her at her bedside, she gave him a quiet smile. At the time, Subaru thought it was just another uncharacteristically good awakening without her usual drowsiness. Emilia looked down to find her hand still enveloped in his, and softly confirmed her intention to continue their conversation from last night.

Emilia: "I'd like to talk... as soon as everything's sorted out in my head. After Ram helps me get dressed, I'm sure I'll be ready to talk about it."

And with this, she drove Subaru out of her room.

As impatient as Subaru was, considering Emilia's feelings, it would've been cruel to hurry her. More importantly, Emilia seemed calm. Pushing her further would only have had the opposite effect. At least, that was what Subaru had judged, but,

Subaru: "With that, I left, thinking you'd take care of the rest..."

Ram: "So you left the building before I arrived... That's what happened. I see— You screwed up, Barusu."

Subaru: "——"

Subaru had no rebuttal against Ram's icy verdict. The fact is, he did mess up by letting down his guard without waiting for Ram to take over. But he never thought Emilia, of all people, would do something like this.

Subaru: "Maybe... she had to use the bathroom, or...?"

Ram: “Do you think I would be careless enough to come here without checking the perimeters first?”

Subaru: “That’s, not what I was... But, what else could it be...?”

Ram: “You really don’t understand?”

Ram relentlessly pursued as Subaru’s voice choked up. Her gaze was cold as usual, but, for just an instant, that coldness seemed to have intensified. The listlessness in her eyes was the same as when she cast him that glance last night. Seeing the disappointment and dejection in her eyes, Subaru lowered his gaze.

Subaru: “—You are saying... Emilia ran away?”

Ram: “What else could it be? Maybe the forces against the liberation of the Sanctuary had been waiting for precisely this opportunity where neither of us is at Emilia-sama’s side and finally got their chance this morning to make their move... But is that what you’d rather believe?”

Subaru: “—It’s... not impossible.”

Ram: “If you actually want to cling to that, then you are more hopeless than I thought. Either way, that does not change the fact that Emilia-sama is missing. Despite the fact that she has no way of leaving the Sanctuary, this is bad.”

Though her attitude was harsh, Ram still took care to lower her voice so that no one would overhear them. She too recognized the need to keep Emilia’s disappearance under wraps, lest it shine badly on Roswaal’s reputation. As such, she must’ve judged this to be a matter to be handled discreetly.

Subaru: “Emilia...”

Looking up, Subaru muttered that girl’s name under his breath.

As Ram pointed out, even if Emilia wanted to abandon everything and run away, there was no way she could leave the Sanctuary’s barrier, being a half-elf. Emilia was still trapped in the Sanctuary, and no matter how she tries to run, she could not get away. She wasn’t so foolish as to fail in recognizing that. But if she was feeling so cornered that she tried to flee anyway, then...

Subaru: “It’s all me and Puck’s fault...”

It was Puck's fault for failing to imagine the extent of the shock Emilia would feel upon losing her bond with him. And it was Subaru's fault for underestimating Emilia's wounds and mistaking her feigned calmness to be genuine.

If Emilia really chose to escape, then it would only be the consequence of their compounded failures.

Ram: "Assuming Emilia-sama ran away and is hiding somewhere... Barusu, any ideas?"

Subaru: "Hold on. Don't just decide that she's run off. I mean, there's nowhere she can go in the Sanctuary without someone seeing her. And there aren't many places Emilia could've wandered to."

Subaru appealed, flapping his hand to stave off Ram's conclusion. Seeing this, Ram expelled a sigh and slightly nodded.

Ram: "I admit that may have been hasty of me, but what do you suggest? The men obviously didn't see anything. Then we'll have to put our hopes on the off-chance that one of the women in the cathedral spotted her?"

Subaru: "The Arlam villagers will say something if they saw Emilia wandering around by herself. Or worse, one of the residents of the Sanctuary might've seen her... We should try them first before jumping to any conclusions."

Even while hurriedly brainstorming ideas, Subaru more or less understood that he was only delaying that conclusion. And though Ram was listening to his proposals, she was most likely thinking the same thing. Their only point of agreement was that it'd be bad if the news got around that Emilia intentionally went into hiding.

But whether they were concerned because of Emilia or because of Roswaal was another story.

Ram: "If either of us can find her soon, we might just hang on by the skin of our necks. But it's best to keep the worst possibility in mind. You do understand, Barusu?"

Subaru: "...Really rather not think about it, though."

Ram's reminder was also a warning for him not to avert his eyes from the worst-case scenario. If they fail to find Emilia before the Trial, and her disappearance becomes common knowledge throughout the Sanctuary— there would be no recovering from this.

And so, they must do everything in their power before that happens.

Subaru: "If we ask around and still can't find her..."

Ram: "Then we'll have to exhaust all efforts to search through the forest."

Subaru: "...That isn't something that is possible to do in one or two days."

Lifting his head, Subaru looked to the forests surrounding the Sanctuary and furrowed his brows. Although blocked off by the barrier, the Sanctuary was still more than wide enough to hide one single person. If Emilia was hiding in the forest, she wouldn't even necessarily stay in one place.

Today, and tomorrow. There were at most forty-eight hours remaining before the bet and Contract's deadline. Within that time frame, he would have to find Emilia, make her challenge the Trials, and have her beat them.

—But is that even possible?

Could he, of all people, after pushing Emilia to her limits without noticing the toll it was taking on her heart, really give her that strength to move forward?

Subaru: "You seriously overestimated me, Puck..."

Ram: "...This would have something to do with the loss of her Contract with the Great Spirit-sama, I suppose?"

Subaru: "Losing the primary support in her heart couldn't be totally unrelated to it. But... neither of us thought she'd snap like this."

There must have been something that pushed her over the limit.

Thinking back on Emilia's calmness last night and this morning, that was the only way he could explain it.

Subaru: “———”

“No way”, he thinks.

He had surely acted after confirming it properly.

But, just hypothetically, supposing that Emilia had noticed——

???: “——Natsuki-san!”

While brooding, the sharp call made Subaru’s shoulders jump in surprise.

Looking over to the village center—— he saw a grey-haired youth, frantically running over with great waves of his arm.

It was Otto, who hadn’t joined them in the morning bath but stayed behind with the villagers in the cathedral to help with the breakfast preparations. He reached Subaru, pale-faced and panting with his hands on his knees,

Otto: “Th—there are several things I need to report. Well, quite a lot more if I go into the details, but... for now, two major things. There’s good news and bad news.”

Subaru: “That sounds important, but I have a question first. Did Emilia show up at the cathedral by any chance? Or was anyone talking about her?”

Otto: “——? No, I haven’t seen her this morning. I didn’t hear anything at the cathedral, either.”

Otto frowned at the apparently unrelated question that couldn’t wait until after the news, while, hearing his obliging answer, both Subaru and Ram’s faces darkened. Otto seemed to have sensed their unease, but, judging that his report was more important,

Otto: “So, good news and bad news... which one would you rather hear first?”

Subaru: “Kinda hate having them bundled like that... Okay, good news I guess?”

When he hears bad news, he'd need time to think of countermeasures. With Emilia's disappearance, the situation was already the worst it could possibly get. He'd rather not get plunged into head-clutching despair by having more bad news piled on top of that.

Receiving Subaru's decision, Otto crossed his arms with a nod,

Otto: "Good news, then. I've finished talking with the refugees as we discussed. They've made their preparations and are ready to leave today at any time you want. I've asked them to stay alert so they can go as soon as you give the order."

Subaru: "—I see. Sorry. I really should've been the one to talk to them and ask this of them."

Otto: "Luckily, they've warmed up to me over the last few days. Considering what we'll be doing together, it's a good thing I had that opportunity. Anyway, they are ready without any problems."

Otto's voice was confident, but, despite his impressive achievement, his face was far from bright. Chances were, that good news was being overshadowed by whatever problem had arisen.

Yielding to Otto's silent gaze, Subaru prompted for the other report—

Subaru: "So, what's the bad news?"

Otto: "Just now, Garfiel came storming into the cathedral in a rage, looking for you, Natsuki-san."

Subaru: "Looking for me...? Why? I don't think I pissed him off that much this time..."

Persuading Garfiel was supposed to have been the final confrontation of this loop. Subaru had taken extra care in his interactions with Garfiel, and even after sealing his bet with Roswaal, Subaru had avoided talking to Garfiel as best as he could.

So far it had paid off, and Subaru managed to reach the critical day without facing off against Garfiel, but—

Subaru: "Ideally, I would've liked to have talked with Ryuzu Theta before dealing with him..."

Otto: "That's just the thing."

As Subaru muttered about the sequence he had hoped for, Otto raised a single finger.

Subaru's eyes widened at this gesture, not knowing what Otto was referring to. But, seeing the question mark pop up over Subaru's head, Otto's face darkened as he said,

Otto: "That Ryuzu-san apparently went missing this morning. Garfiel's been searching all over the village, looking desperate. That's why he's looking for you, Natsuki-san."

Arc 4 Chapter 99 - Alone in a Confined Space

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 13, Chapter 4 “Lies, Liars, and Con Artists”, Part 5 (loosely adapted), and in Volume 14, Chapter 1 “—Journey of Memories”, Parts 2-3

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#), [Part 4](#)

—Two vital characters have simultaneously gone missing.

Naturally, facing a situation that had never come up in these loops, Subaru’s insides were burning with panic. Sprinting through the Sanctuary, Subaru headed for Ryuzu’s residence—the small cabin on the outskirts of the village, in which she had been living in after lending her home to Emilia.

Garfiel: “...Look who decided t’come.”

When Subaru belted open the door and stormed inside, he found Garfiel standing there imposingly, waiting for him. With arms crossed, nose furrowed, and irritation in plain view, he glared at Subaru,

Garfiel: “Took y’long enough. How long were y’plannin’ t’keep my amazin’ self waitin’?”

Subaru: “Well I got here as fast as I could... But never mind that, what’s this about Ryuzu-san being missing?”

Garfiel: “Can’t y’see for yerself?”

Garfiel jerked his chin, indicating the cramped room. Looking over the space, were it wide enough to be called that, Ryuzu’s temporary lodging was a simple shack with no furniture other than a bed. And if Ryuzu is not present upon that bed, then without any doubt she is absent from this house.

Composing his breathing, Subaru roughly wiped the sweat off his forehead with a sleeve.

Subaru: “It’s obvious she’s not here, but... isn’t calling that missing a bit too much? Ryuzu-san may not look like it, but she’s a proper adult already. Maybe she’s just out for a walk or something, there’s no need to...”

Garfiel: “Shut up! Th’fuck d’you know!? Granny ain’t never missed showin’ up at breakfast fer no fuckin’ reason. My amazin’ self’s never seen her oversleep or stay sick in bed either, y’sayin’ she’s takin’ a walk? Y’want me t’eat ya!?”

Subaru: “That was a rough way of putting it, but your life with Ryuzu-san sounds pretty cozy, huh...”

Circumstances are circumstances, but the basis for the idea that Ryuzu has gone missing is incredibly weak. Pointing this out, Subaru slumped, but Garfiel didn’t seem to share in Subaru’s sentiment. He walked up to Subaru, who finally straightened his back, and bared his fangs,

Garfiel: “It never happened before, yet it’s happenin’ this mornin’. If anythin’s happenin’ now that ain’t happened here before, it’s ‘cause you people are involved, even an idiot knows that— Y’bastard did somethin’ with Granny, didn’t ya?”

Though Garfiel seemed to have an incredible knack for making baseless accusations, this time, his suspicion hit right on the mark. Ryuzu’s, or currently Ryuzu Theta’s, disappearance was almost certainly because of Subaru. It was hard to imagine that someone would have kidnapped her and Emilia simultaneously.

She left willingly without saying anything to Garfiel. Just like Emilia, she should be obstructed by the Sanctuary’s barrier, so she couldn’t have fled outside. In other words, it was her intention to go into hiding— And the time-limit for finding her was even more pressing than Emilia’s.

Subaru: “If I don’t find Theta-san by the end of today...”

The rotation schedule will switch her into tomorrow’s Ryuzu— Alpha, Beta, or Sigma will take her place. If that happens, he will not have another chance to speak with Theta within the two-day limit, and his perfect run of the Sanctuary route will be thwarted.

Garfiel: “Thee... ter?”

Hearing Subaru call Ryuzu this, a question mark floated onto Garfiel’s face.

Subaru was about to ask for Garfiel's help in finding Theta, but he gave up on that idea the moment he saw Garfiel's expression. The question surging up inside Subaru prevented him from saying a word.

Subaru: "-----"

It was a simple question, but one he had never confirmed.

—Does Garfiel actually know about the four representative Ryuzu personalities?

Garfiel certainly knew about the Ryuzu Meyer inside the crystal in the abandoned Experimental Grounds deep within the forest. He had challenged the Trial, met Echidna, and qualified as an Apostle of Greed. Naturally, holding the command right over the replicants, Garfiel was aware of the existence of the identical-looking Ryuzu clones.

But, what about the rest? Does Garfiel know about the four Ryuzu personalities, Alpha, Beta, Sigma and Theta?

Garfiel: "Th'hell's that? Y'stopped talkin' all of a sudden. If y'got some kinda clue, fuckin' spit it out now. «Straight 'n honest Lib-Lib's happy even when he's swindled», they say."

Subaru: "Sounds like Lib-Lib's going to be swindled forever, like that..."

Imagining the story of some random happy prince, Subaru wasn't sure how best to answer Garfiel.

His confrontation with Garfiel was supposed to be the final barricade to completing the Sanctuary route. Honestly, Subaru wasn't nearly prepared enough to face him without having heard what Theta has to say. And yet, whatever answer he gives here could inadvertently influence the outcome.

—Just how should he respond? After much deliberation, Subaru,

Subaru: "Say, Garfiel. Couldn't you just summon Ryuzu-san if you wanted to?"

Garfiel: "-----Guh!!"

Immediately, Subaru saw Garfiel's expression violently shift. Garfiel's eyes wavered in discomposure as he lunged forward, grabbing Subaru by the collar. At a distance so close that their foreheads almost

touched, Garfiel's golden pupils seethed with rage—a rage so intense that it could burn its target to nothing with that gaze alone.

Garfiel: “Th’fuck y’talking about... My amazin’ self ain’t got a shred of fuckin Milfram’s clue th’fuck yer talkin about, oy!”

Subaru: “I—I don’t know what a Milfram is, but... that’s not exactly the reaction of someone who doesn’t have the shred of a clue, is it... Let go, dumbass.”

Perhaps flipping out and grabbing Subaru was just his way of calming himself. Garfiel’s words as he tried to cover it up was inherent nonsense.

Hit right on the mark by Subaru’s observation, Garfiel’s grip loosened as Subaru used the opportunity to escape. Smoothing out his crumpled clothing, Subaru took a step back to put some distance between them,

Subaru: “I meant exactly what I said. I know you are not too stupid to understand. You have a way to do it. You have the quickest, simplest solution on hand. Why aren’t you using it?”

Garfiel: “Y’say it like it’s fuckin’ easy... Tch.”

Garfiel’s cheeks twisted in disgust as he glared at Subaru with utmost hatred.

But despite the intensity of the rage and hostility harbored in those eyes, Subaru could clearly discern a shadow of grief mixed within it. Noticing that hint of sorrow, Subaru’s expression shifted, but Garfiel, sensing that the depths of his emotion had been seen through, clicked his tongue and looked away.

Garfiel: “That’s why my amazin’ self can’t let down my guard with a qualified bastard standin’ here. No idea what that fuckin’ Witch filled yer head with. Fuck off, fucking fuck off.”

Subaru: “———”

Garfiel: “So y’know about Granny’s Experimental Grounds? Then y’must know ‘bout Granny’s original in th’rock as well... It ain’t something y’can just use.”

Clutching his chest with his right hand, it was as if Garfiel was trying to hide it from Subaru's view. Even though it probably wasn't physically there, Subaru figured he must be indicating the invisible command right he possessed.

And with his arm still holding his chest,

Garfiel: "My amazin' self ain't anythin' like you 'n Roswaal. I ain't gonna use somethin' just because I can... I ain't never gonna think like that."

Subaru: "...Garfiel."

Garfiel: "Just me alone is enough. Long as I got myself, I don't need anythin' else. I ain't fuckin' usin' this power unless it's the last of the last of the last resort— She... she's my nanna."

Those last words fell to a whisper.

Subaru had heard him call her "nanna" once before. But this time, it was far tender than he had ever heard him speak. Without any intention behind it, what slipped out must have been Garfiel's true thoughts.

Garfiel: "—Tch."

Noticing his own slip-up, Garfiel kicked at the floor in frustration. The exorbitant force caused the whole shack to lurch, sending down specks of dust tickling Subaru's head as he waited for Garfiel's next move.

Realizing that he was the only one getting worked up, Garfiel's expression twisted in even further discomfort as he shoved Subaru out of the way.

Garfiel: "Move. My amazin' self ain't talkin' with you anymore. If you ain't tellin' me where Granny is, my amazin' self'll just look for her. When I do, I ain't letting y'touch her ever again."

Subaru: "Why does that... Why does that kinda sound like it's all my fault?"

Garfiel: "Before you... Before y'fuckers came, everythin' was peaceful 'n nothin' ever happened here. My amazin' self'm bringin' us back to that time. My amazin' self doesn't need anythin' whether it's in here or out there... I don't need nothin'."

Leaving those faltering words behind, Garfiel marched out of the small shack. Bending his knees as soon as he was out of the door, he bounced using the bestial strength of his legs—and although his path was straight, he disappeared from view in only a matter of seconds.

Batting away the dust that Garfiel's departure had kicked up, Subaru decided to check over the room once more before leaving. Regardless of Garfiel's hasty conclusions, would Ryuzu really disappear without leaving a trace? Or at least, she might have left some hints about where she was going—

Subaru: "But then again, if left any hints behind, the guy who's known her for ages would've noticed it. My nose isn't as sharp as his and my eyes aren't any better..."

After five minutes of searching and finding nothing, Subaru sighed with that self-deprecating lament. Heading out of the cabin, he gazed in the direction of the village, in thought.

Subaru: "———"

Emilia and Ryuzu Theta, those two had almost simultaneously disappeared. Chances were, both of them left their buildings of their own accord and were trying to hide from Subaru and everyone else. There was even a possibility that they were working together.

Subaru: "I don't remember Emilia and Ryuzu-san being close, but..."

Ever since arriving in the Sanctuary, Emilia's mind had been occupied by the Trials and the Royal Selection. Subaru couldn't recall a single instance where she casually interacted with anyone here. At most, she had some conversations with Subaru, Ram, Otto, but she seldom spoke with Ryuzu or Garfiel.

Thinking about it now, her lack of interaction with others might've been the reason she was so fixated on her lonely sense of duty, and it was Subaru's fault for not paying enough attention to her. If Subaru had done more to smooth things out, Emilia would not have had so many emotions pent up inside, and perhaps they would have found a clearer solution to their problems.

Subaru: "But it's a bit late for that, isn't it...?"

This wasn't the time to be thinking about the underlying causes of Emilia's disappearance. More importantly, delving into it would only push Subaru further into blaming himself. There was no time to wallow in self-loathing now.

Subaru: "It's a good thing Garfiel doesn't know that Emilia's also missing... Not that he'd prioritize looking for her before looking for Ryuzu-san, but there's no knowing what he'd say if given the pretext."

Even this small relief would be pointless if he doesn't find Emilia soon. But finding Ryuzu Theta was not a matter he could put off, either. And if he doesn't find Theta before Garfiel does, it wouldn't be easy getting past the overprotective Garfiel afterwards.

In other words, what Subaru needed to do could be summed up as follows,

Subaru: "Secure Emilia and Ryuzu Theta before Garfiel does, figure out Theta's reasons for opposing the Sanctuary's liberation, get Emilia back on her feet, have her challenge the Trials, and do all of that within half a day... Huh."

???: "...Natsuki-san, just how thorny does the path have to be before you are satisfied?"

As Subaru came to that rather bleak conclusion, Otto showed up by the door just in time to butt in.

Arriving quite a bit later than Subaru, who sprinted here, Otto looked around the shack's disheveled interior and furrowed his brows.

Otto: "Even if you are rummaging through a house, you could've been more elegant about it. Though, your conversation with Garfiel seems to have concluded safely."

Subaru: "Concluded safely, sure, but can't say I got anything out of it. Anyway, I've reaffirmed the situation and our next course of action is just as I mumbled."

Otto: "All I got from those mumbles was that new problems are now piled on top of the old ones and now it's all a jumbled mess, more or less."

Subaru: "...."

Unable to weasel around Otto's accurate impression, Subaru slumped his shoulders.

Nevertheless, the fact that Subaru was feeling more at ease than before was no doubt because Otto's presence meant he would no longer have to agonize over it alone.

Otto: "...I'll feel troubled if you keep giving me that blatantly-relieved look, you know."

Subaru: “—? What?”

Otto: “...Forget I said anything. You don’t seem to realize it, huh. No way you do. Aaaaagh but if you do and you are doing this to me on purpose, then I’m totally getting led by the nose here, aren’t I...?”

Watching Otto messing up his gray hair, Subaru tilted his head. But, without answering Subaru’s confused expression, Otto shouted,

Otto: “Anyway! There is no doubt that the already hopeless situation just got even worse. So what do we do? Now that the circumstances that made me want to run for it already managed to plummet even further, how are we getting out of this? I have a feeling that if we hurry now, we could still dump everything and make a run for it.”

Subaru: “After everything you’ve seen and heard, you still think we can drop everything and run away? Neither of us is the kind of people who can do something that irresponsible, right?”

Otto: “...But it looks like Emilia-sama has done exactly that.”

Looking away, Otto muttered with a sigh.

It was not done out of spite. Otto was simply venting the dissatisfaction pent up in his chest. Realizing this, Subaru did not blame him for it. Subaru only lightly shook his head,

Subaru: “Emilia isn’t the kind of girl who’d turn tail and run in the face of her problems...”

Otto: “But, how can you say that, Natsuki-san? I’ve been meaning to say this for a while now, but are you sure you are not too fixated on only Emilia-sama’s attractive side?”

Subaru: “...What’s that supposed to mean. Well, yeah, Emilia is so beautiful that my eyes could explode.”

Otto: “While I definitely agree with that, I’m sure you know that’s not what I meant.”

Seeing his lame joke easily swept aside, Subaru twisted his lips under Otto’s gaze.

As if finding it a bit too painful to watch, Otto raised a finger.

Otto: “Are you listening? I understand why you’d only want to see the good side of someone you have a crush on. I’m sure that kind of thing is very common. And so I don’t blame you for projecting your ideals on her.”

Subaru: “———”

Otto: “But Emilia-sama is not a perfect person. In fact, she has quite a few problems. And that includes the factors that are totally outside of her control. Her origin, her standing, and all the other issues that come with it.”

Listening to Otto’s fluent speech, Subaru figured Otto must’ve wanted to lecture him on this for quite some time now and had prepared those words beforehand. And indeed, his words were sound and left no room for rebuttal.

Otto: “Naturally, those external factors are unrelated to Emilia-sama’s inner purity. And her outward beauty only compounds to her charm. But, Natsuki-san, Emilia-sama is only a mortal... She’s just an ordinary girl. And just like ordinary girls, she has her share of worries, weaknesses, and unattractive aspects to her as well.”

Subaru: “No but, only Emilia...”

Otto: “That you blindly regard Emilia-sama as extraordinary like this is truly odd. Natsuki-san, since coming to the Sanctuary, you must have seen plenty of Emilia-sama’s shortcomings first-hand, right? Those shortcomings won’t be limited to this place. They will come up again and again in the future as well. Emilia-sama’s aspirations are too high above the reach of ordinary people, after all.”

That was Otto’s opinion of the height of Emilia’s aspirations—— the Throne.

A pinnacle which many others, just like Emilia, were also aspiring to reach.

Crusch Karsten, noble and sincere, of high-minded ideals and undeniable ability.

Priscilla Barielle, arrogant and insidious, and consequently unshakable in her will.

Anastasia Hoshin, greedy and calculating, devoting everything to realizing her dream, having reached her current station by her unmatched competitive spirit.

Felt, poor and weak in initial position, but nonetheless possessing ambition which would not permit her to stagnate, having exhibited capabilities disproportionate to her age.

Every other Royal Selection candidate was in possession of peerless determination and virtue.

Faced with these worthy opponents, was Emilia really fit to stand among them?

She was kind, kinder than anyone else. But was that really enough?

Otto: “Right now, Emilia-sama is still lacking in all sorts of things. She is not ready. And the way she is now, she’ll probably want to flinch and run away in the face of hardships. This would be one of those times she chose to flee. Why can’t you see it, Natsuki-san?”

Subaru: “...But that’s... I don’t... Emilia would...”

Never. But as much as Subaru wanted to continue, he couldn’t. He couldn’t find the words. The feeling was certainly there, his feelings about Emilia. But how could he form it into words here so Otto would understand?

Subaru: “———”

Otto: “...You are really stubborn, you know that?”

Subaru bit down on his lip and could only stare at Otto with resistance in his eyes. But, seeing that gaze, Otto looked away. Shrugging with an astounded shake of his head, he turned his eyes towards the village,

Otto: “We don’t have to reach a conclusion on this right now. Just talking about it won’t change the situation, anyway. We’ll still have to find Emilia-sama and Ryuzu-san.”

Subaru: “...Sorry. I know there are lots of things we should properly talk about.”

Otto: “I’ll overlook it since we are friends— So, what do we do now?”

Jerking his chin— indicating the Sanctuary, Otto left the next course of action up to Subaru. Should they run, or should they fight? And which one of the two missing people should they search for first? The fact that he’d leave those decisions to Subaru was just proof of how much Otto trusted him.

Though he had no intention of taking that trust lightly, Subaru couldn't help but smile to himself for the blessing he'd been given. And,

Subaru: "Garfiel doesn't know that Emilia's missing. And even if Garfiel does find Emilia, it's not too much of an issue— The worst case would be that Garfiel finds Ryuzu-san before we do. If we lose the chance to talk with Ryuzu-san, we'll be getting even further away from the perfect ending."

Otto: "...In other words?"

Subaru: "—We'll search for Ryuzu-san first. We find her before Garfiel, and hear what she has to say."

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???: "—Emilia. Everyone's about to have an important talk. So be a good girl and wait in your usual spot, okay?"

With this, young Emilia was shoved into the hollow of the great tree deep within the forest, the so-called Princess Room, which was one of the things in life she wasn't particularly happy about.

In the village in the forest where the elves lived in secret, Emilia grew up loved by everyone.

All the adults adored her and would indulge her little whims without the slightest complaint. While the fact that she rarely got to play with other children made her feel a little lonely, she had to follow her instructions. Rules like that must be firmly kept— that was what her foster mother, Fortuna, had told her.

Fortuna was the one who took care of Emilia in the elven village, a person who was like a mother to her. She had silver hair and amethyst eyes just like Emilia, but she'd cut her hair short since she found long hair too much of a hassle, and the sharpness of her eyes set them far apart from each other.

Emilia could no longer remember when she first started living with Fortuna. All she knew was that Fortuna wasn't her real mother but a blood-relative somewhere in the vicinity of an aunt.

Fortuna: "I'm your father's younger sister, you know. My brother... your dad and your mom are busy right now and can't be here with you... so they've asked me to look after you."

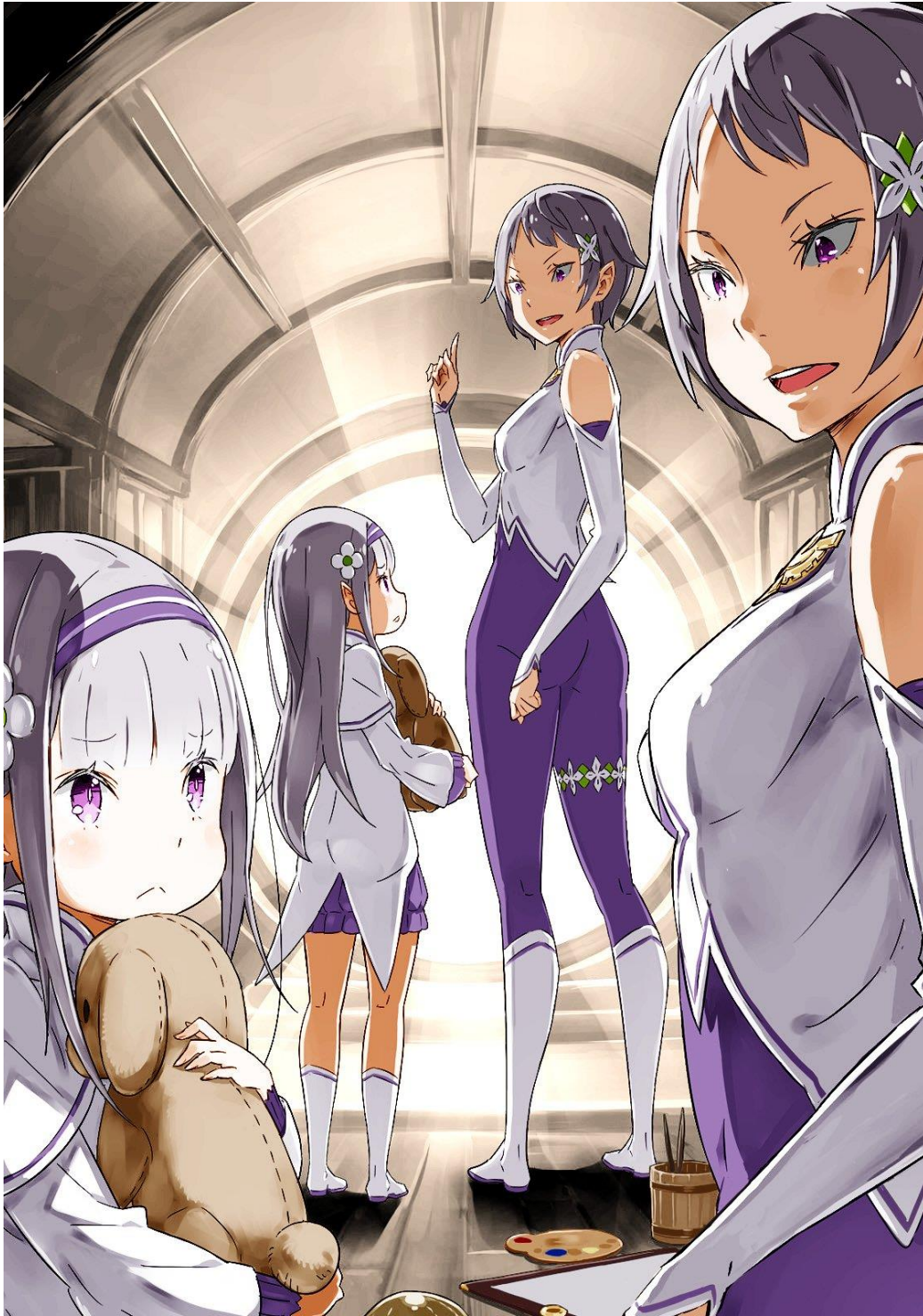


Illustration from Volume 14, coloring by DdukaE ([source](#))

Fortuna's explanation came as a great shock to Emilia. But that said, the shock was not a negative one. Even though she kept insisting that she wasn't her real mother, as far as Emilia was concerned, Fortuna was undoubtedly her mother.

And, on top of having mommy Fortuna, she had a father and a real mother as well. Normally, people only had two parents, a mom and a dad, but Emilia had a dad and two moms. She thought it was something to be happy about.

Fortuna: "Your silver hair is from my brother. And the color of your eyes too, it really runs in the family... Your gentle face is from your mother, though. Everyone on our side has scary-looking eyes."

Emilia: "...But I like your eyes, mommy Fortuna?"

Fortuna's eyes were usually harsh and stern. And occasionally, when Emilia made her mad, the sharpness of her eyes would intensify, causing Emilia to shudder tremendously. But, aside from those times when she got angry, Fortuna was Emilia's ideal mother, and Emilia received her sharp eyes with emotions of love.

As a mother, Fortuna was strict but kind. Although the young Emilia sometimes thought the rigid discipline imposed by her to be a bit excessive, Emilia understood that it was all with her best interests in mind, even at her young age.

Her discipline was never accompanied by violence, and she never scolded Emilia for anything unreasonable. Even on the rare occasions she would make Emilia cry because of her reproaches, they would reconcile the same night and fall asleep in each other's arms.

Fortuna: "If there's one thing I reeaally regret, it's that I wasn't kinder to people. If I had realized that sooner, my brother wouldn't have waited till the end to rely on me."

A loneliness would rise on Fortuna's face whenever she said "Reeally". This left such a strong impression on Emilia's mind that she made a special effort to imitate it. Except she would use it not when she was sad, but when she was happy and laughing. Perhaps it was the shallow wish of a child to paint over the memories of her mother's loneliness and sadness by using it for something uplifting and joyous instead.

Emilia: "Mmuuu... so boring."

Back to where our story began, Emilia was shut up in the Princess Room alone.

She didn't like being called "Princess" very much, but since that was what everyone in the village called her, she had grown used to it by now.

Because she knew they weren't making fun of her but instead saying it with affection, she never requested that they stop. But the fact that they had stuck that moniker on the room she was being shut up in was one of young Emilia's few dissatisfactions in life.

Emilia: "What could everyone be doing..."

If Emilia was shut inside the Princess Room, it meant there must be visitors from outside the village. Quite a large group of outsiders would occasionally enter the forest to visit the hidden elven community. And while no one ever told Emilia this, she could always sense it on her skin.

Actually, this sixth sense of sorts was due to Emilia subconsciously interfering with the Micro Spirits in the forest which informed her of those people's presence, but Emilia didn't know this at the time.

Hugging her knees in the narrow room, Emilia usually passed her time flipping through the pages of the books she'd been given or playing with the shabby doll Fortuna had made for her.

Although she had been told that those were secret talks that only adults could understand, there seemed to be plenty of children present as well, which only added to Emilia's dissatisfaction. She mustn't tell lies or keep secrets, that was what mommy Fortuna had taught her. But wasn't it wrong for mommy Fortuna and the adults to lie and keep secrets from Emilia?

Every ten days or so, Emilia would be stuffed inside the Princess Room. Though Emilia wasn't happy about it, she wasn't as naughty a girl as to let it show on her face.

But by now, she had already lost count how many times she had been put in here, not to mention that she'd just had a fight with Fortuna the night before. Most of all, she forgot to bring the doll that Fortuna had made for her, having left it in her bedroom, which proved to be the decisive blow.

Emilia: "I wanna go outside..."

It was but a passing murmur that no one was supposed to hear.

But, while Emilia didn't say it to anyone she knew, those who knew her had heard it loud and clear.

Emilia: “—?”

Inside the hollow, in the room lit by the white glow of lagmite ores¹⁵⁵, there now mingled floating spots of pale-blue phosphorescence. She blinked as the sudden gushes of light captivated her attention. Dancing before her eyes, the lights kept the young girl's curiosity captive as they migrated to a corner of the Princess Room— where they disappeared as if sucked into the wall.

Emilia: “——”

Standing up, Emilia tottered to the spot where the lights had vanished. She was a little scared, but curiosity burned even hotter inside her chest. Standing before the wall that had sucked in the lights, Emilia reached out her hand as if to confirm the feel of the wood, and there, she found an opening just large enough for her little arm to fit through.

Just now, the pale-blue lights had escaped through that gap.

The front door of the Princess Room was bolted from the outside and could not be opened from within. It was designed so that Emilia couldn't escape even if she wanted to. Thinking about it now, this treatment was definitely a tad too excessive to be considered normal, but Emilia, who took it for granted at the time, never questioned it.

However, now that she had discovered the possibility of escaping the place that should've been impossible to escape, Emilia's heart wavered between her curiosity and her mother's instructions.

She wanted to know what everyone in the village was doing while she was gone.

Mommy Fortuna had taught her to strictly follow her instructions, and Emilia needed to stay here in the Princess Room until Fortuna came back for her.

But what if she tested out this escape route and, once she had a peek of what everyone was doing, sneaked back here?

¹⁵⁵ In case you don't remember, these are minerals that produce light. Subaru uses one on the very first episode to enter the Loot House after dark.

Besides, it was the adults who first broke the rule not to lie and keep secrets. If they broke one, and Emilia broke one as well, then wouldn't they just be even?

Emilia: "———"

The little girl thought with all her might and came up with that little justification.

Taking a closer look at the hole she had stuck her arm into, it was one of the gaps between the tree's tangled roots. If she put all her strength into it, she felt certain she could widen the gap, if only just a little.

Hinging on that feeling, young Emilia pushed away at the roots to secure a space large enough for her to pass through. Sweat dripped from her brows, and mud soiled her clothes. There was no way she could tell Fortuna "I didn't do anything" now, but even so, the gap between the roots continued to grow until, at last, she succeeded in crawling outside.

Emilia: "———Ah."

A strange sense of accomplishment rose in Emilia's chest as the outside breeze washed over her.

Even though she had just done something that would earn her a scolding if she were found out, she still felt the compelling urge to run up to Fortuna and brag "Ahem, I did it". Of course, Fortuna's scolding would be as vicious as flame, so Emilia quickly stopped herself before she could start running. Whew, crisis averted.

But then again, Emilia thought,

—Had I followed my idiotic logic back then, gone to get praise from Fortuna, gotten vehemently scolded, cried and wailed and regretted it, and forgotten all about that gap in the tree roots, everything would've been so much better.

Because had I done that, I would never have set the subsequent tragedy in motion.

———But what was that tragedy?

The question did not reach the young Emilia who had just escaped the Princess Room, now triumphantly dashing towards where everyone should be. The realization that she was doing something naughty soon

forced Emilia to sneak from cover to cover, and, thanks to the help of the Micro Spirits, she got a vague sense of where everyone was.

Before long, Emilia found everyone gathered in the village square. While, alongside them, she saw a group of people in strange black garbs.

Emilia: “———”

Emilia hid herself behind a large tree before nimbly climbing up its branches. Sometimes, when little Emilia was feeling mischievous, she’d scamper from tree to tree like a little animal to make the adults jump around to catch her. The acrobatics she learned from those activities now allowed her to watch over the conversation unseen.

The population of the elven village numbered forty in all. And it seemed all the adults and children, aside from Emilia, were gathered there. The black robes were fewer in number, with only about twenty members.

A few of them were in the middle of the assembly, participating in the discussion, while the rest were unloading luggage. The black robes seem to have arrived on wagons, and as they transferred their cargo to the villagers, the villagers’ faces would brighten while bowing their heads.

???: “—We can’t thank you enough for the care you’ve always shown us.”

What are they doing? What are they talking about?

Wondering this, Emilia wanted to lean out to see, when she heard a voice as close as a whisper against her ear.

She jerked back in surprise but saw no one around who could have been the source of that voice. Nevertheless, that voice undoubtedly belonged to Fortuna. In fact, Fortuna was directly below Emilia—speaking with a black-robed figure who seemed to be the leader of the group.

Fortuna: “It really does help everyone that you’re procuring us this stuff we can’t get in the forest. We are glad for your help.”

Robed Man: “You are too kind. It vexes us greatly that this is the only way we could repay you. We are always laying burdens on you, Fortuna-sama.”

Fortuna: “We could say the same as well.”

Emilia could clearly make out the contents of their conversation and the wry smiles exchanged between them. Fortuna’s gestures below her left no doubt that they were the ones talking this very moment. But somehow, it was as if Emilia’s sense of hearing was amplified.

This was actually the handiwork of the Micro Spirits obeying Emilia’s will, but naturally, the young Emilia did not notice their diligence.

Standing in front of Fortuna was a man with bold features, garbed in a black robe. His muscular physique and stature made him stand out among the mostly slender elves. Because of that, it was almost unimaginable that, despite his martial appearance, he would bow so low while interacting with Fortuna.

Seeing such an imposing man showing such unreserved respect towards Fortuna filled the peeking Emilia with pride. To think, that the amazing person making this big man grovel was actually her mother.

Robed Man: “Now, I ask this every single time, but... how is the seal?”

Emilia was puffing up her chest in her somewhat misdirected pride, but that sentiment instantly dispersed the moment the man changed the subject.

Such was the heaviness of the complex emotions imbued within that man’s words.

Fortuna: “I suppose I can’t just laugh it off as you being a worrier. Rest assured, it’s as stable as ever. There isn’t even a million-to-one chance it could come undone— I’d never be able to face my brother and sister-in-law, otherwise.”

Robed Man: “It’s a terrible shame, about your older brother and his wife.”

Fortuna: “...My brother must certainly have been resolved for this. As for my sister-in-law, I’m not quite sure even now. But I do understand the weight of the responsibility entrusted to me. I don’t intend to abandon it or treat it half-heartedly. I’m sure you feel the same?”

Robed Man: “I... I have no choice in the matter. I’m afraid it’s not the same as the sense of duty and responsibility you bear, Fortuna-sama. Obsession, attachment... Perhaps something along those lines.”

The man gave a breathy laugh as Fortuna watched him with a pained expression.

All the while, the meaning of their little exchange completely eluded the present Emilia.

—“It’s a terrible shame, about your older brother and his wife”, what was that supposed to mean?

Fortuna’s brother was Emilia’s father. Then his wife would be the person he married. His bride. And Emilia’s mother. “It’s a terrible shame”, what could that possibly mean? And when Fortuna heard this, why didn’t she ask any questions?

Hugging her branch tight, Emilia stretched out her neck and perked up her ears so she could hear their conversation more clearly. Unaware of the Micro Spirits’ blessing and the fact that her gesture was completely pointless, Emilia desperately kept up that posture so as not to miss a single word.

Fortuna: “Motivations have nothing to do with the nobility of an action. What you are doing deserves to be praised by tens of thousands. It’s reeeaally unfortunate that it can’t become common knowledge.”

Robed Man: “Haaahaha. I appreciate the words of comfort. But it is onerous, nonetheless. If our true intentions were revealed to the world, I suspect society, currently stable as it is, would once again be plunged into chaos. I’m sure neither you nor I... and least of all, her, would want to see this.”

Fortuna: “...Hm, I suppose not.”

Fortuna agreed with a nod.

After that, the topic seemed to drift away from what Emilia wanted to hear, and their subsequent conversation consisted mainly of casual small talk. While Fortuna and the man conversed, the rest of the group had finished distributing the cargo. One of the adults called to Fortuna, and Fortuna nodded in reply before turning back to the robed man.

Fortuna: “Thanks to the Spirits’ protection, the changing seasons don’t have much of an impact on the forests... But still, these clothes and blankets are a great help. Thank you.”

Robed Man: “Because of your deeds, you and everyone here should deserve better than this. You shouldn’t be forced to live in such a place.”

Fortuna: “What are you calling «such a place»? We love living in the forest, you know.”

Saying this jokingly, a faint smile emerged on Fortuna’s face. The man also smiled in return as the two shared an amicable moment together. And then,

???: “Archbishop-sama. The items have been transferred, we are ready to depart. Please make haste.”

Robed Man: “Mhm, understood.”

Hearing the black-robed figure’s report, the man reluctantly took one last look at the village. Then, he gave Fortuna a bow, while Fortuna and the other adults put their hands to their chests and bowed to the group of black robes in response.

The man turned away to follow behind the departing wagon train— but then, he halted,

Robed Man: “Right, there was one more thing I wanted to ask.”

Fortuna: “...”

The man turned around and lifted a finger, while Fortuna urged him to continue with her silence.

Seeing Fortuna’s attitude, for a moment, the man closed his eyes, before gazing into the depths of the forest,

Robed Man: “—Emilia-sama, is she well?”

Emilia: “—Eek!”

Hearing the man mention her name, Emilia unwittingly squeaked on the tree branch. But luckily, since she had just exhaled, it only came out as a little groan. Luckily, no one seemed to have heard it, and Fortuna only slowly nodded to the man’s question,

Fortuna: “She’s fine. Emilia is healthy and growing up to be a good girl. A good girl who’s... wasted on me... But, I’m sorry. I cannot let you meet her.”

Robed Man: “That’s all I needed to hear. I understand. As long as Emilia-sama is safe and well, that’s more than enough. A sinner like me cannot dare covet anything beyond that.”

Fortuna: “...”

Rather than self-deprecation, it sounded more like he was cautioning himself. But either way, no easy words of comfort escaped Fortuna’s lips as she heard this.

The man looked up with an expression as if he was relieved by Fortuna’s silence. And, after a while of staring at each other without either of them breaking the stillness,

???: “Archbishop-sama, is something the matter? —Archbishop Romanée-Conti-sama?”

Someone ran back from the party that had gone on ahead. Hearing his name, the robed man spread out his arms,

Robed Man: “Not at all. Well, I best be going. Fortuna-sama, I’ll see you soon.”

Fortuna: “Thank you for everything, as always... And sorry, Juice.”

Faintly smiling at Fortuna’s parting words, the man she called Juice rejoined the party as they gradually left the forest.

Seeing them off until the last of them was out of view, Fortuna dropped her shoulders with a sigh. Then, she clapped her hands, drawing the attention of everyone present onto herself,

Fortuna: “Now, let’s hurry and get everything distributed. Please distribute them in the usual manner. I’ll go fetch Emilia and bring her out.”

Emilia: “———!”

Seeing the adults and children proceeding to transport the goods as per Fortuna’s orders, Emilia practically flew down the tree and sprinted towards the Princess Room as fast as her legs could take her.

She squeezed her tiny body through the gap she’d used to escape, and despite getting cuts all over her skin, Emilia managed to get inside. But, once inside, she was horrified to realize that her wretched appearance looked nothing like that of a good girl who had obediently waited in her room.

Until recently, Emilia had thought that even if Fortuna discovered that she'd went outside and reprimanded her because of her actions, she'd be forgiven if she apologized and sincerely reflected.

But, after hearing what she had just heard, that optimism had all but vanished. In fact, Emilia was certain that she had just heard something she was never supposed to hear.

Emilia: "What do I do, what do I do what do I do whatdoldo—"

Mommy Fortuna could come back and unlock the door any moment now. One good look at her, and it wouldn't take much to figure out that Emilia had sneaked outside. If Fortuna found out that she had heard that conversation, it'd mean complete and utter ruin for the young Emilia.

Emilia: "At least, I've got to hide the scratches..."

There were cuts all over her skin, her knees and elbows were scraped, and blood was oozing out of some of the wounds. There was no way those injuries could escape Fortuna's sharp eyes, and just the thought of how they'd hurt in a bath was frightening.

She had to do something, but, just when she was immersed in that thought—

Emilia: "—Huh?"

—Emilia saw the pale-blue lights appear in the Princess Room once more, their glow a sign of salvation. The shining particles drifted in Emilia's vision, captivating her consciousness with their movements before sprinkling onto her body.

Emilia: "—Ah, aaaaah."

Just like when they were sucked into the wall, the pale-blue lights sank into Emilia's skin. As if attacking the young girl's wounds, they gathered at the various scratches, staining the wounds white with their faint glow— and, by the time the lights disappeared, only a vague redness remained where the cuts used to be.

Emilia: "——"

The inexplicable transformation of her body left Emilia petrified and speechless. The painful wounds on her elbows, knees, and skin had vanished, and Emilia's body was restored to the state before her escape.

Realizing this, Emilia took off her clothes and changed into a spare dress in the Princess Room. But then, the torn and shabby clothes she'd just taken became a problem.

Emilia: "I know...!"

Tipping over the bottles of colorful drawing ink, she smudged them all over her torn clothes. And when she had stained them so thoroughly that they could never be washed clean again,

Fortuna: "—Emilia? Are you awake?"

She heard Fortuna's voice outside the door and quickly straightened her back. Feeling her heart pounding violently at the extremely tight timing, she tried to give some kind of reply, but her throat couldn't utter a sound.

Fortuna: "Emilia? Did you fall asleep?"

Emilia: "I—I'm up? I'm up, mommy Fortuna. It's just, I..."

Fortuna: "Oh, so you are awake. Sorry for making you wait for so long..."

As if relieved to hear Emilia's reply, Fortuna unlocked the door and entered the room. But the moment she walked in, Fortuna's smile disappeared as she wrinkled up her pretty nose,

Fortuna: "...What happened? Smells like ink in here."

Emilia: "Uhhm, sorry. I accidentally spilled all the paint... I got it all over my clothes, too."

Looking at the toppled paint jars in the center of the room, then at the befuddled Emilia behind it, Fortuna held her palm to her face with "Ah geez...",

Fortuna: "Well, there's no helping it now. Good thing we had spare clothes in here. Otherwise, I'd have to carry you back naked, you know."

Emilia: "Um, mommy Fortuna... I..."

Fortuna: "It's alright, Emilia. There's no need to be scared, I know you didn't mean to, so I'm not angry at you. More importantly, are you hurt?"

Crouching down to match Emilia's height, Fortuna looked her beloved daughter up and down just to be sure. And when she saw there were no obvious injuries, Fortuna spilled a relieved sigh and gently took Emilia into her embrace.

Emilia: "Mommy?"

Fortuna: "No, it's nothing. I just... reeeaaally missed you, Emilia. I'm sorry. Just let me hug you for a little longer."

Keeping Emilia in her embrace, Fortuna pressed her cheek against Emilia's.

Normally, Fortuna would always be too embarrassed to make such gestures of affection, so this was very rare for Emilia. Perhaps, it was an indication that Fortuna was truly worried. And,

Fortuna: "...Such cheek."

Fortuna softly opened her eyes and muttered as, wrapped in her embrace, Emilia stroked her short silver hair. But, without paying heed to Fortuna's objection, Emilia went on caressing Fortuna's hair to her heart's content.

There were so many things she wanted to ask her. But young Emilia lacked in too much and knew of too little for her to be able to put them into words. She proceeded, saying nothing.

Fortuna: "Hey, Emilia."

Emilia: "...Hm?"

Watching as Emilia quietly stroked her head, Fortuna narrowed her eyes. Suddenly, in her amethyst eyes that were the same color as Emilia's, a teardrop appeared.

In a blink of a moment, the teardrop rolled down and dripped off Fortuna's cheek, but without wiping it off, Fortuna only looked at Emilia, smiling.

Fortuna: "—I love you, you know."

There were still so many things she wanted to ask.

—But, right now, those words from her mother was enough, she thought.

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Dragging her feet in the darkness with pale-blue lights drifting around her, Emilia marched on.

Exhausted, sapped of even the strength to walk, she could barely lift her feet off the ground. But her still-persevering consciousness did not allow her to stop but only continue forward.

Memories from her childhood flashed across her mind. But why was she remembering them now?

The past Emilia saw in her Trial was slightly different from the past she'd just remembered. The past she remembered was a bit earlier than the events shown in her Trials.

If she could return to that time, somehow— surely, everything would be different.

Emilia: “Mommy, Fortuna...”

Kind, warm, and strong, Fortuna was Emilia's ideal woman, even now.

She wanted to grow up to be mommy Fortuna, to be just like mommy Fortuna. But every time she was faced with the slightest adversity, she'd grow hesitant, vexed, and afraid until it resulted in consequences beyond the possibility of repair.

Emilia: “Uh... guh... Hk.”

Whenever she thought about those consequences that could not be repaired, Emilia's chest would be wracked by unendurable pain.

Sorrow, regret, and agony, overwhelmed by these tangled emotions, Emilia was brought to the verge of tears by her own stupidity, inadequacy, and shame.

Always. She's always like this. Frantically, desperately, unreservedly giving her all, Emilia would nevertheless fail to obtain what she truly wanted, or to even touch it.

Even the things she should have had, should have held safely in her hands, slipped through her fingers like sand, enchanting Emilia with their transient glimmer before vanishing into nothing.

Fortuna, Puck, Subaru, it was the same with all of them.

Emilia: "It's all... my fault. All because I'm... a bad girl... who couldn't keep her word... Everyone..."

Sobbing under her breath, Emilia's feet dragged on.

Amidst the thick brambles of green, sluggish and slow, she pressed on nonetheless.

Emilia: "Everyone tried to hide it from me... Hide it... But, no. If I could've gone on without knowing, if I never learned of it... If I never found out, how much better that would be, and yet... Yet..."

In the forest. The pale-blue lights. The men in black robes. Mommy Fortuna. The gigantic Black Serpent. The closed door. The snow. The world of white. The silvery-white world. The end, the world that was ending. Father, mother.

Emilia: "Yet I..."

The endless maelstrom of words raced through her head. Tossed and tormented in its wake, Emilia raised her head and pressed forward.

Emilia: "-----"

With feeble voice. And faltering steps.

— But eyes wet not with a single tear.

Arc 4 Chapter 100 - Memories Buried in Dust

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 14, Chapter 1 “—Journey of Memories”, Parts 3 & 5, and
Volume 14, Chapter 2 “The Beginning of the Sanctuary and of Ruin”, Part 1

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken – [Part 1](#), [Part 2+3](#)

—Blindly searching like this wasn’t going to get them anywhere.

That was the conclusion Subaru came to after looking for Ryuzu all over the village and straining his cardiac and respiratory functions to the point that his lungs were aching.

Subaru: “—Haa, ha, haa.”

Holding his knees, he heaved his shoulders up and down to pump oxygen into his lungs.

The mental fatigue that had accumulated over the past few days flooded back all at once, and his limbs felt heavy as if they’d been injected with lead. Even breathing was difficult.

Otto: “Natsuki-san, you alright? But seriously, you run out of steam way too quickly, you know.”

Subaru: “Sh—shut up... I, just suddenly, remembered... I was still undergoing medical treatment when all these things came up, and my exhaustion’s just about reaching its peak...”

Otto: “Okay okay, I get that you are a sore loser, you just sit here and rest a while. Give your body a break and take some time to think. I’ll go fetch some water.”

Seeing the exhausted Subaru, Otto spilled a small sigh, pointed to the shade of a tree, and left him there.

Watching Otto leave while scowling at how pathetic he is, Subaru sat down under the tree and focused on restoring his breathing.

Subaru: “———”

Almost an hour had passed since he parted with Garfiel and started searching for Ryuzu Theta.

His and Otto's two-man human-wave tactic hadn't yielded any results so far. Yet, just like with Emilia, they couldn't exactly go around recruiting helpers.

Because of her position as representative of the Sanctuary, the Sanctuary's residents and refugees shouldn't be allowed to hear about Ryuzu abandoning her duties and going missing. Garfiel must've had similar thoughts when he went on to search for her alone.

Subaru: "Emilia..."

If Subaru was honest about his feelings, he was more worried about Emilia's safety than Ryuzu's. He doubted she would do anything rash, but knowing how lost and lonely she must be feeling, he couldn't help but want to rush to her side and console her.

But the cruel reality was just as he told Otto— Finding Ryuzu was more urgent. There was no room to be sentimental about this.

Still, Subaru hoped that Ram's separate efforts could manage to find Emilia.

Subaru: "Kinda feels like I'm conceding something to Roswaal, though."

Ram clearly belonged to Roswaal's faction. She was only searching for Emilia out of concern for Roswaal's reputation, not to help Subaru or Otto. It was just that her present efforts to serve Roswaal happened to be aligned with Subaru's.

The optimal flow would be for Subaru and Otto to find Ryuzu then go on to find Emilia. If Subaru could nail both of those conversations back to back, that would be best.

But ideals were ideals. Only empty rhetoric. Making plans for a tanuki's hide before it has been captured¹⁵⁶.

¹⁵⁶ The original expression is “とらぬ狸のなんとやら”, an expression similar to “counting chickens before they've hatched”, which was the original translation by both SummaryAnon and TranslationChicken. If you can read Japanese, perhaps [this](#) will be of use to you.

Subaru: “At this rate, we’ll run out of time before we find either of them. That’s the worst case and absolutely cannot be allowed to happen... But we have to do something...”

Panicking wasn’t going to help. Instead of standing still, thinking, wouldn’t it be more reliable to just comb through every corner of the Sanctuary?

Subaru: “If doing that would find them, then Garfiel would’ve gotten to them first. It’s been an hour already. That guy can move twice as fast as me and Otto, so if he hasn’t found her yet, that means...”

—Ryuzu was trying to elude them so that even Garfiel couldn’t find her.

Subaru: “———”

At this thought, Subaru felt a tug in his mind as he held his breath.

Something was off. Ryuzu was trying to elude Garfiel. That much was right. But, that’s not right at all. Why would Ryuzu want to run from Garfiel? Wasn’t Ryuzu Theta running because she wished to avoid confronting Subaru? Subaru figured she didn’t want to answer his questions about the Trial and decided to go into hiding until her rotation ended.

But that wouldn’t make any sense. If Theta really just wanted to avoid talking to Subaru, all she had to do was communicate her desire to Garfiel. He would not hesitate to eliminate Subaru when given a clear reason to. And in the case Garfiel decided to attack him, Subaru would have no means of fighting back.

If Theta truly wanted to keep her past hidden, she could have incited Garfiel to do this. So why hadn’t she done this, and why wouldn’t she do this—?

Subaru: “She’s running... because she wants to be chased...?”

???: “Well surely the whole point of running is to not get caught. So what are you talking about?”

Subaru was holding his chin, muttering, when someone else butted in. Looking up, it was a perplexed Otto handing him a pitcher full of water,

Otto: “I can understand getting a little overwhelmed with so many things to think about. Back when I had to stay awake for four days straight going around doing business deals, I felt pretty unhinged by the last day too.”

Subaru: "Setting aside that story of your past hardships for another time, it's not like I'm going crazy... I'm not... I don't think."

Otto: "You are sounding less and less confident about that."

Accepting the pitcher, Subaru held the spout to his mouth and poured. Relishing the cool sensation sliding down his throat, he organized his tangled words,

Subaru: "What's your take on why Ryuzu-san disappeared?"

Otto: "...Well, she probably wants to avoid an inconvenient conversation, I'm guessing? If she runs into you today, she'll have to talk whether she wants to or not... but, considering how she can't leave this place, I can't deny that it feels like a stopgap measure."

Subaru: "Exactly, it's a stopgap. But if she really wanted to solve the fundamental problem, you know how she could easily do it?"

Otto: "—You mean Garfiel?"

Otto effortlessly deduced the conclusion Subaru had come to from the few hints given. Furrowing his brows, he crossed his arms as if in thought.

Otto: "Right, by that line of reasoning... then maybe Ryuzu-san doesn't want Garfiel to know about her disagreements with you?"

Subaru: "Still, Garfiel is already suspecting that we have something to do with it. When he said that nothing ever went wrong in the Sanctuary until we came along and set it off, I didn't know what to say."

Garfiel had hit it right on the mark. Either way, Garfiel had found the indirect cause of Ryuzu's disappearance. And there was no way Ryuzu could have failed to consider how Garfiel would react to her being missing.

Subaru: "Which means, there are only two conceivable possibilities."

Otto: "Either she wants to avoid both Natsuki-san and Garfiel and decided to go into hiding, or..."

Subaru: "Knowing that we'll be looking for her, she's waiting to be found...?"

If it was the former, then Subaru and Otto might as well give up here. If petite Ryuzu really wanted to hide, she could easily hold out for half a day. The only one who'd have a chance of finding her would be the sharp-nosed and agile Garfiel.

But, if it was the latter, then Subaru and Otto's chances against Garfiel were fifty-fifty. In that case, Ryuzu must certainly have made her arrangements accordingly.

—There must be another way to find her besides blindly searching.

Subaru: "We should search somewhere related to Ryuzu-san."

Otto: "But we've already searched her home... And her actual home is where Emilia-sama went missing, so that doesn't..."

Subaru: "Yes, right. I doubt she would've gone to Roswaal, or to the Experimental Grounds... That was probably the first place Garfiel looked. Which means..."

If Theta had to choose a place that Subaru and Garfiel would have an equal chance of finding, one which Garfiel wouldn't immediately investigate—

—If such a place existed, it would be,

Subaru: "...Otto, I think I got it."

Otto: "R—really? You got it from our little exchange just now? You sure you aren't jumping the gun here?"

Subaru: "Don't know why you are being so negative with me, the likelihood is pretty high. In fact, if this isn't it, then it'll be time to throw in the towel."

Nodding to the stumped-looking Otto, Subaru drank down the remaining water in a single gulp. He wiped off his lips, stood up from the ground, and gazed in the direction of the place he had in mind.

If Theta was there, then she wasn't running away. She was simply waiting in the spot most appropriate for this conversation.

Waiting for Subaru, or perhaps waiting for Garfiel.

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Fortuna: “We are about to have an important talk, so just wait here for a bit, okay?”

Emilia: “Yes, mommy Fortuna.”

Emilia obediently replied to Fortuna, who had brought her to the Princess Room and told her to wait there.

Seeing the smile on Emilia’s face as she saw her off, Fortuna couldn’t help but slightly widen her eyes. She patted Emilia’s long silver hair and relinquished a worried sigh. Before, Emilia would always look a little upset about being left behind in the Princess Room. As much as she tried to hide it, the way she puffed up her blushing cheeks and turned her face away left no doubt that she was pouting.

It’s been a while since she saw that obvious attitude on Emilia’s face, so, naturally, Fortuna was worried.

Fortuna: “...Emilia.”

Emilia: “Huuuuuh?”

Fortuna: “—Hmmm, never mind.”

She stroked her hand through her daughter’s hair as if wanting to ask her something, but, seeing Emilia’s innocent eyes gazing back at her, Fortuna only shook her head, smiling.

Though she still couldn’t help but worry, Fortuna figured she should just be glad that Emilia wasn’t making a fuss. And since there were visitors waiting for her, Fortuna decided to leave well enough alone. Waving her little hand, Emilia said goodbye to Fortuna as the door closed behind her, the sound of the door’s bar clunking into place echoing. With the door safely locked, Emilia was left in the Princess Room alone.

—Or not. Lately, that hasn’t been the case.

Emilia: “Okay, you can come out now.”

Waiting a whole minute to make sure that Fortuna had left for good, Emilia returned to the center of the room and called out in a whisper. Naturally, she was the only person in the room, and no one was supposed to answer— but little specks of pale-blue phosphorescence drifted into the slightly lit chamber.

Seeing their dull, faint glow, Emilia's amethyst eyes quivered with joy. Over the time she spent in the Princess Room, she seemed to have inexplicably acquired the ability to communicate with them. She called them Fairies— though they were actually Micro Spirits, and while Emilia's name for them was close, the nuance was a little bit off.

Regardless, the Micro Spirits did not fault young Emilia for her rudeness,

Emilia: "Fairy-san, Fairy-san, thanks for coming today."

The little girl said, thanking them for not letting her be alone. Hearing this, the lights glowed bright, dancing in reply.

Emilia: "——"

Watching the dancing Micro Spirits, Emilia intensely recognized their good will towards her. They were not only here to dispel her loneliness, but to help her to the best of their ability. And whenever Emilia grew too lax while walking around outside, they would promptly warn her before anyone spotted her.

—She had escaped the Princess Room many times after that.

No one seemed to have noticed the gap in the tree roots leading outside, and Emilia continued using it for her escape. At first, she had gotten cuts over body and clothes while trying to force herself through, but now that she'd acquired the knack for it, it was no longer a concern.

Until then, she had to apologize for getting her clothes dirty over and over, and Fortuna had nearly thought it to be suspicious. It was really a close call.

Emilia: "She was definitely reeeaaally suspicious. But it all worked out in the end. Heehee."

Emilia puffed up her chest, bragging about her improvements, while the pale-blue lights swirled around her head as if praising her. Soon, she was feeling giddy from the dazzling light show.

Nevertheless, while she had become a regular escapist, her grand adventures outside were all composed of cute little mischiefs. She'd listen in on the adults' conversations like the first time, eat ripe fruits from the trees without permission, or rearrange the furniture in someone's home to confuse them, but nothing more than that.

Yet, mischief is a thing that compounds in intensity every time, and the pure and innocent Emilia was no exception to that progression.

Emilia: "Alright. It's time to head out."

Fairies: "———"

The lights swayed as if in agreement, and, encouraged by her reinforcements, Emilia beautifully escaped the Princess Room. Spreading the roots that had been loosened by her numerous escapes, she slid her small body into the gap and then pulled herself outside. She rolled down the moment she was free and landed on a bed of leaves which softened the blow. This was something she had prepared after the lessons she learned from all the tumbling in her previous attempts.

Emilia: "What should I do today?"

Picking off the leaves that had stuck onto her hair, Emilia asked the lights around her. Though she knew they couldn't answer, seeing them respond with their oscillating brightness assured her that she wasn't alone.

It was good that she could come outside, but soon, she'll be running out of things to do. If she kept repeating the same mischief, people would figure out that she was behind it and conclude she could escape the Princess Room. And if they plugged up the hole, it'd be all over.

Emilia: "Let's take it slow until things cool off."

Muttering like a wily, crafty criminal, Emilia wandered aimlessly towards the village. Most likely, the adults would be gathering in the village center as usual, conversing with the black-robed figures and receiving their gifts.

Meanwhile, mommy Fortuna would be chatting with the tall man, whom Emilia had heard being called "Romanée-Conti", or, by her mother, "Juice". Emilia secretly decided to go with Juice. But while she

found the adults' conversations fascinating at first, after repeatedly eavesdropping on them, they eventually lost their freshness and Emilia was growing tired of it.

Fortuna and Juice would talk about all sorts of topics that went over Emilia's head. The only reason she still frequently listened was in the hopes that they would bring up her mother and father like they did the first time so she could hear a little more about them.

Unfortunately, that hasn't happened so far.

Emilia: "Maybe..."

She could sneak into one of Juice's wagons?

If Emilia slipped her little body in between the crates on one of those covered wagons, they could stow her outside the forest, just like that. She had never seen Juice's friends check the wagons before leaving. But, even with the fairies' help, it'd be impossible to sneak in unnoticed.

Emilia: "...Mmmmuu."

Thinking along those lines and realizing that it wouldn't work, she gave up on that idea. After all, leaving the forest would be the worst possible way she could break her promise to Fortuna.

—She absolutely must not leave the forest. There are things outside that would be scary for Emilia, and it'd be too dangerous before she turns into an adult. At least, that was what she'd always been told. And even though she was already breaking the rules, she wasn't going to break all of them. Perhaps that too was young Emilia's virtue showing through.

And so, the plan to hide in the wagon and get stowed away was scrapped in the drafting phase. Instead, she figured she'd find some other way to learn more about her parents.

Emilia: "—Hup, hup."

In the time she spent thinking, she had reached the village square where the adults and Juice's companions were meeting. Emilia nimbly darted up a nearby tree, laid flat on her belly, and perked up her ears.

As always, Fortuna and Juice were happily chatting off to the side while the others unloaded the cargo. Except today, Fortuna's expression was especially warm,

Fortuna: "Emilia's been cheerful lately, and reeeaaally full of energy. I just wish she'd stop getting mud all over her clothes."

Juice: "My, my... It's good to hear that she's doing well. We could bring some more clothes for her if you wish. It'll be winter soon outside the forest, and we'll have lots of out-of-season clothes to spare."

Fortuna: "We are always imposing on you, I'm sorry to further burden you like this... But would that include clothes for adults as well?"

Juice: "Yes, certainly. I'm sure you'll look very nice in them, Fortuna-sama."

Juice said with a tender expression, while a complicated hue rose on Fortuna's face. She scratched her cheeks, as if embarrassed,

Fortuna: "...Now where did you learn to speak like that? We've known each other for ages, but since when did you start telling jokes?"

Juice: "It was just the first thing that came to mind. Did I say something strange just now?"

Fortuna: "I know you are not one to tell lies, which only makes this even more impossible..."

Fortuna pressed her hand to her forehead, looking baffled. But the unmistakable smile on her lips proved that she wasn't upset.

Actually, far from being upset, she seemed to be thoroughly enjoying their exchange.

Emilia: "...Hmph."

For some reason, seeing her mother like this was making Emilia feel all icky inside. Fortuna's expression was usually stern, and she rarely showed her gentle side in front of people other than Emilia.

But now, it was like something important to her mother was being stolen, and that stinks.

Emilia: "Hrmp, stupid Juice."

She lashed out at her one-sided acquaintance. Puffing up her cheeks, Emilia decided that if Juice doesn't say something interesting soon, she's going to pull some mischief on his wagons today. Maybe clog the wheels with cloth or pour oil all over the cargo bed. Such were Emilia's vows of petty revenge, but these dramatic retributions would never come to pass.

Juice: "—Now, is the seal still safe?"

Lowering his voice, Juice asked Fortuna the usual question. Fortuna replied with a nod, and said,

Fortuna: "Nothing's changed. Every single time, you ask me this, you know."

Juice: "That is my duty, after all. Besides, this season's that season. While this problem may be cyclical, there have been especially many moonless nights this year, so the circulation of Mana has been insufficient. I'm worried this might have a negative impact on the seal deep in the forest... I can't help but feel anxious."

Fortuna: "The moon, huh... Right, I see. So that's why the Micro Spirits in the forest have been acting strange lately... I understand. Afterwards, I will go check on the seal myself to make sure it hasn't come loose."

Juice: "Then I'll leave it to you."

Saying this, Juice bowed low, while Fortuna turned him a serious gaze and nodded.

Eavesdropping on their exchange, Emilia muttered "Deep in the forest..." under her breath.

Emilia had already explored the village in its entirety. And naturally, she had conquered every corner of the forest that Fortuna had allowed her to play in. Although she never said it out loud, she saw the forest as her own backyard.

Yet, Emilia knew nothing about this place located deep in the forest they had mentioned. She figured it must be somewhere in the depths of the forest where entry is forbidden— Another one of those things they had specifically hidden from her. The more she thought of it like that, the more dissatisfied she became.

And before she knew it, all her pent-up dissatisfaction was about to boil over.

As usual, she didn't learn anything useful about her parents, and her exciting grand adventures outside the Princess Room were becoming routine and stale. Worse, the same adults who talked their tongues off about the things Emilia mustn't do were lying and keeping secrets behind her back. So many examples of this had surfaced in so short a time.

—Maybe it's time she got back at them a little.

Who could blame Emilia for thinking this?

Back then, no one ever chastised Emilia's budding mischievous spirit and only allowed it to swell and grow, which only hastened the coming of that time. And that was why, so many years later, the only person left to blame Emilia was no one but Emilia herself. She would endlessly fault herself for her own stupidity back then, though it would not be enough to lighten the weight of her sin.

—But that belated regret did not reach the young Emilia.

While Emilia was rolling up her sleeves with misdirected motivation, Juice and Fortuna's conversation had come to an end. After unloading all the goods without a hitch, Juice's group bowed farewell as the adults saluted their departure.

Seeing this, Emilia swiftly flew down from the tree branch and rushed back to the Princess Room. Quickly squeezing through the gap in the roots and into the hollow, Emilia hurriedly set about composing her alibi. She made some quick drawings, changed her dolls' clothes, and gobbled up her sweets. Once all that was done, she swiped off the sweat on her forehead and heard Fortuna's voice outside the door.

Fortuna: "Emilia, sorry you had to wait. Have you been a good girl today?"

Emilia: "Eh... H—have I been a good girl? I have. Mhm, yep, I have."

Fortuna: "——"

Convinced that she was fooling Fortuna with her expert performance, a satisfied expression rose on Emilia's face. But, seeing Emilia like this, Fortuna silently narrowed her eyes.

Getting a bad feeling about that sharp gaze locking onto her, Emilia figured any misstep here would only deepen her suspicion.

Emilia: “Wh—what is it, mommy Fortuna? Even if you stare at me like that, I didn’t do anything. I just ate some sweets, drew some pictures, and played with my doll a little. I didn’t go outside at all. Really.”

Fortuna: “—Is that so... Well, alright.”

It seems Fortuna was completely deceived by Emilia’s acting. Although she felt guilty about lying to her mother, Emilia reminded herself not to be bothered by it too much, and instead focused on plotting her ruthless revenge instead. Fortuna and Juice were talking about a Seal deep in the forest. As far as Emilia could remember, a Seal should be a place used for hiding something.

That is, for hiding something that’ll be trouble if it got out.

—And so, the manner of Emilia’s revenge on Fortuna and the adults was decided.

She will find the location of this Seal deep in the forest, and whenever Fortuna or anyone else wants to scold her, she could use it in her rebuttal as her bargaining chip.

Should they ever catch her slipping out of the Princess Room, the location of the Seal would be her trump card.

Emilia was so excited about her ingenious plan that she completely failed to notice the irony of trying to escape the guilt of leaving her room by sullyng her hands with something even worse.

Holding her mother’s hand, they left the Princess Room. Once she had brought Emilia home, Fortuna said she had some things to do. Going by her conversation with Juice, Fortuna must be going to check the Seal. And so,

Emilia: “—I’m counting on you guys.”

Emilia winked to the pale-blue lights, bidding them to follow her mother.

A glimpse of Emilia’s later beauty that could enchant a person with a smile alone had already begun to bud on the little girl’s cheeks.

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This was the second time Subaru visited this place, but the first in this loop.

The lonely building stood atop a small hill. It wasn't especially run-down, instead looking more like an average home with no notable characteristics. Comprised of a bedroom and a living room, the lounge hosting a simple kitchen, divided much like a small apartment unit in Subaru's original world. It was enough for a single person to comfortably live in, but it must've been cramped for an adult and two kids.

That was the sentiment Subaru held as he ruminated on the significance of this building.

Standing outside the door, he gave it a few knocks. Then, after a brief silence, he heard "Come in" from inside and was relieved to know that he was right.

But he immediately put away that sense of relief as he placed his hand on the knob and opened the door. The faint fragrance of old wood grazed his nostrils. And, feeling the lukewarm air meeting his skin, Subaru stepped inside,

???: "It took you longer than I thought."

In the back of the room, there sat a figure on the austere bed. Apparently, they were just getting a refill of tea, pouring boiling water into their cup.

That was probably the reason behind the dampness pervading the room. Subaru confirmed that there were three cups on the table— but only one was filled.

Subaru: "So I'm the first guest to arrive?"

Theta: "That's right. You are the first, Su-bo. Hope you like your tea a bit strong."

Subaru: "Doesn't really matter. Weak or strong, leaves just taste like leaves."

Theta: "A comment like that makes me wonder why I even bother brewing for you. Now I understand what Ram's always grumbling about."

Wryly smiling at Subaru, Ryuzu— Theta took an empty cup and proceeded to fill it with boiling water. After throwing in some tea leaves to soak, she pushed it over to Subaru.

Theta: "Here, you must be thirsty. Go on, drink up."

Subaru: "I think if I down the whole cup like this, my remaining HP's gonna drop straight to zero. But... thanks."

Theta furrowed her brows, a bit confused by his joke, while Subaru blew on his tea to cool it before bringing it to his lips for a sip. The thick flavor of grass passed over his tongue and down his throat.

No matter what name they're called or who brewed them, leaves are still just leaves.

Subaru: "I couldn't even get used to Rem's tea... My body really doesn't accept this stuff, seriously."

Theta: "I should've guessed... Well, that settles it. I'm never gonna brew tea for you again."

Watching Subaru scrunch up his face and stick out his tongue, Theta gulped down her cup of tea in a single breath. Then, giving her own hair a few pats through her dangling sleeves, she plonked herself back on the bed and faced Subaru once again,

Theta: "I was hoping to lighten the mood a bit before our talk, but I didn't expect we'd end up with even more disagreements."

Subaru: "When you put stuff from the side stories into the main text, readers who happened to skip them will get confused so let's have no more of that. Switch gears switch gears, let's just get to our conversation."

Theta: "You say these things like it's no effort at all..."

Giving an astounded sigh, Theta held her little palms to her forehead. Then, her gaze passed through Subaru, as if to stare beyond the door.

Theta: "Setting that aside... So it was you, Su-bo. I thought as much. Rather than Gar-bo, chances were, either you'd come here alone, or neither of you would think of this place before my rotation ended."

Subaru: "...The odds were pretty stacked against Garfiel, huh. If that guy hears what you just said, he'll probably be wailing."

Theta: "Wailing, bawling, is that all it'll be...? I was imagining a reaction more serious than that. If Garfiel finds me here, that is. But I'm not too worried about that."

With a lonely smile on her face, Theta looked towards the living room wall. Subaru followed her gaze and saw the metal shields hanging there, gleaming with their silvery sheen—the two shields crossed over each other, adorning the wall just as he had seen them last time.

When they were little, the siblings Garfiel and Frederica would play ramming at each other with those shields, filling each dent and crevice with memories— Simply put, this was Garfiel and Frederica's childhood home.

Subaru couldn't quite understand why Theta chose this place for their final conversation. But he did remember from a previous loop that this place held a special significance for both Ryuzu and Garfiel. And trusting that memory, Subaru came here and found Theta waiting for him, just as he thought.

Theta: "It's good you came alone, Su-bo. After all, this isn't something I'd want people to hear."

Subaru: "Yeah, I left Otto behind. Didn't think I should bring him along for what we are about to discuss here."

While the statement sounded like he was leaving a warrior behind for a fight that was out of his league, that was not Subaru's intention at all. It was just that Ryuzu's past was a subject that would necessarily involve the Witch. It was enough for Subaru to have to bear this alone.

And so, he had tasked Otto with another role.

Subaru: "Theta-san, is it safe to say that you are the only Ryuzu-san who's been inside the Tomb?"

Theta: "Thee... ter?"

Subaru: "Ah, my bad. That's what I've been calling you for convenience's sake. Yesterday was Sigma-san, and the other two are Alpha and Beta. If you don't like it, I'll stop..."

Theta: "...No, it's fine. I see, so that's what it meant. Aah, I see, I see... Surprisingly, I don't dislike it."

Muttering "Theeter, Theeter" over and over under her breath, Theta's face softened as if embarrassed. She closed her eyes, and, after several seconds of silence, opened them again,

Theta: "What I'm about to tell you is everything I have seen of the Sanctuary's creation... And a part of the events leading up to Ryuzu Meyer being sealed inside the crystal."

Subaru: “—Right.”

Theta: “As for what you’ll think once you’ve heard it, and what you’ll want to ask me... As one of the four representative Ryuzus of the Sanctuary, I will leave that up to fate.”

Declaring this weighty responsibility, Theta smiled as Subaru held his breath,

Theta: “Is your heart up to the challenge?”

Arc 4 Chapter 101 - Theta Part 1

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 14, Chapter 2 “The Beginning of the Sanctuary and of Ruin”,
Parts 2-3

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken – [Complete](#)

One of Ryuzu’s representative personalities, whom Subaru called Theta—

—Had entered the Tomb and touched the past of her progenitor, Ryuzu Meyer, but the memories were incredibly fragmented, and even the chronology of events was indefinite.

Theta figured this must be because her existence was created from various fragments severed from the original Ryuzu Meyer’s soul.

In which case, the other Ryuzus— Alpha, Beta, Sigma, and perhaps even the replicants that never developed a personality, would all see different glimpses of the past.

But even if that hypothesis was correct, Theta would not want them to enter the Tomb.

—Because for Theta, just the thought of the other Ryuzus witnessing the past that she saw was accompanied by unbearable and intolerable agony.

???: “—What do you want, I suppose? Staring at me isn’t going to make me give you anything.”

The memory began with a girl, her hair faintly hued, who glared at her.

A girl with a lovely face.

Her hair, so fair it seemed to meld into the light, and her skin, so white it looked nearly transparent. With big, round light-blue eyes, her appearance could be described simply with the word “sweet”. Her hair was tied into two long, swirling pigtails, the mere sight of which revealed their smooth, silky texture

and springy softness. She wore a dress of a subdued hue that gave the young girl a mature look. But, considering the splendor of the girl herself, the color of her dress was in perfect harmony with her appearance.

Ryuzu: “———”

Pierced by the adorable girl’s perilous gaze, Ryuzu recoiled a little.

Compared to this girl, Ryuzu’s own attire and appearance were the very definition of shabby. They were of about the same age, which made her own wretchedness even more conspicuous, and just standing here in this spot was incredibly embarrassing for her because of it.

Girl: “Hmph. A coward, I suppose.”

In front of the speechless Ryuzu, the girl let out a snort of displeasure.

Although her adorable appearance made even that gesture come off as cute, for Ryuzu, the feeling tugging at her heart pained her even more than being rebuked. But before she could realize that it was something akin to fear of upsetting this girl—

???: “Beatrice. What’s with that attitude? I don’t remember teaching you to behave like that.”

There came a mild voice that made the girl’s expression tense up. The voice came from behind the girl, and in front of Ryuzu’s view.

Coming out of a small shed in the back of the village was a woman of true white. Her hair flowed long and fair, and not even light could match the translucence of her skin. Only her irises and lips, as well as the long-sleeved gown she was wearing, adorned her with contrast, conveying her existence was indeed reality to those around her.

The person walking towards Ryuzu and the girl was the great benefactor of this village— the revered Witch, Echidna.

It was to Echidna’s voice that the girl named Beatrice reacted so dramatically. She turned around with her expression still tense, and,

Beatrice: “Aah, ehm... It’s not what you think, Mother! It wasn’t Betty who’s... It’s just, this girl was...”

Echidna: “I don’t remember teaching you to make disgraceful excuses, either. Be honest and speak the truth. If you are confident that you are not at fault, then you shouldn’t be tripping over yourself. Am I wrong?”

Beatrice: “You are not... wrong, I suppose...”

Echidna’s voice harbored no sharp emotions, but was laden with a silent, pressuring strictness.

Beatrice slumped her shoulders and brought her hands together, looking timid,

Beatrice: “Betty was quietly waiting outside just as you told me to, in fact, and this girl came over, I suppose. Staring at me from way over there... it was incredibly rude, in fact. So I called out to her and asked what she wanted, I suppose.”

Echidna: “Hm. I see. You there, do you agree with that account?”

Ryuzu: “Ah... Ah. Y—yes, I do. Please forgive me. I—it was very rude of me, and...”

Beatrice’s description was accurate. Ryuzu had been standing in the village outskirts, vacantly staring at the small girl leaning against the fence. Beatrice was probably waiting there for Echidna to finish whatever she was doing. Her posture and her eyes seemed almost lonely, and Ryuzu felt a tug at her chest as she saw this.

But if she had said that out loud, they would probably snort and laugh at her. So Ryuzu only shrunk her little body even smaller, hoping to outlast the storm by keeping her head down.

Echidna: “You don’t deny it? Then it would seem that Beatrice was right, and you were a little rude, Ryuzu.”

Beatrice: “That’s right, Mother. So Betty didn’t do anything wrong at...”

Echidna: “However, it is your fault that your imperious attitude frightened her so much, Beatrice. I’m sure I’m always telling you this. You are indeed special, but that doesn’t mean you can look down on others.”

Beatrice: “Uh, muuuuh...”

Beatrice's gloating at Echidna's affirmation was immediately met with her rebuke.

While listening to their exchange, Ryuzu suddenly realized that Echidna had remembered her name, a fact which moved her so much her insides trembled all over.

It was a small village, yet she was just an insignificant child.

Yet the revered Witch, their great benefactor, remembered her name nonetheless. This was an indescribable honor for a resident of the Sanctuary who idolized the Witch of Greed with their utmost gratitude and respect.

Echidna: "I'll have Juice straighten you up when we get back to the mansion. I expect he'll be very enthusiastic."

Beatrice: "...I don't like Juice very much, I suppose."

Echidna: "He says himself that it's his duty to be disliked, so that's exactly what he's going for, I'd say."

Giving the grimacing Beatrice a light smile, Echidna turned her face towards Ryuzu.

Ryuzu's heart unwittingly jolted. Figuring that she'd missed the timing to join the conversation, Ryuzu was just about to slip away when Echidna's attention caught her completely by surprise. And just like this, Echidna walked up to Ryuzu, whose shoulders remained hitched and rigid.

Echidna: "Sorry for startling you, Ryuzu. Her name is Beatrice... She's something like a daughter to me. As you can see, her discipline isn't quite up to par, which is a little embarrassing."

Beatrice: "I'm not «something like» your daughter, I am your daughter, in fact!"

Echidna: "Well, I guess. She'll be accompanying me on my visits to the Sanctuary rather often now. You'll have more chances to interact with each other from now on, so I would like you two to get along."

Ryuzu: "U—understood. You can leave it to me, Echidna-sama."

With Echidna's hand on her shoulder, Ryuzu's heart fluttered with joy as she nodded.

Receiving Ryuzu's promise, Echidna nodded back in satisfaction, while behind her, Beatrice muttered "...Hmpf, Betty's just fine on her own, I suppose." under her breath.

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???: "You there, excuse me. I'm certain that Echidna-sama should be somewhere around here, have you seen her?"

Stopped by that call, Ryuzu turned around with a basket of laundry in her arms.

And, realizing who the person calling her was, she just about yelped. She was just on the verge of fumbling the basket of laundry in her arms when an outstretched arm reached out and propped it back in place.

???: "Ah, hup—"

Ryuzu: "Uuuwaah, I am so sorry!"

Facing the youth who practically skated up to her to stop her basket from dropping, Ryuzu quickly bowed her head. Seeing this, the boy raked his fingers through his long, navy hair.

Youth: "No, don't worry about it. I'm the one who should apologize, for failing to notice that you were carrying something. That was very inconsiderate of me."

Ryuzu: "N—no, not at all... I don't deserve your apology, Mathers-sama."

Youth: "Whoever it may be, no one should forget to be considerate towards a lady... Just one correction, though, I don't especially favor being called by my surname. You can just call me Roswaal."

Saying this to the flustered Ryuzu, the youth— Roswaal, winked.

He was about four or five years older than Ryuzu, and one head taller. His limbs still had some room to grow, and his sonorous voice hadn't fully become an adult's. He possessed that sensual appeal only attainable in the short interlude between boy and man, and his bearing was so abounding in natural dignity that even the young Ryuzu was feeling his charms.

And who could blame her? Roswaal, despite his youth, was head of the House of Mathers, which governed multiple domains, an associate of Echidna the Witch, and the governor of the Sanctuary, all combined into one remarkable man.

He was contributing to the Sanctuary's preservation in a different way than Echidna's, and everyone had always told Ryuzu not to be rude to him.

Feeling her cheeks reddening from Roswaal's wink, Ryuzu frantically grappled for the topic he had stopped her for,

Ryuzu: "Well, um, so, Echidna-sama... I've not yet seen her today. Beatrice-sama wasn't at the usual place, either."

Roswaal: "I, see. Then she might be delayed. But Echidna-sama aside, it's inconceivable that Beatrice would fail to immediately come to see you."

Ryuzu: "Erm, um... I think... it's really just a coincidence that Beatrice-sama and I run into each other so often..."

Roswaal: "You are saying it's a coincidence because that's what Beatrice calls it, yes?"

At Roswaal's question, Ryuzu only wordlessly nodded.

She had interacted with Echidna's daughter, Beatrice, countless times since they were introduced. Beatrice would come alongside Echidna on her visits to the Sanctuary which she worked into her busy schedule, and Beatrice would often loiter about the place while Echidna tended to her business. In the meantime, she and Ryuzu would meet with surprising frequency. Time and time again, they'd run into each other while Ryuzu was gathering the laundry or out picking wild vegetables,

Seeing Ryuzu's reaction, Roswaal laughed, unable to hold it in.

Roswaal: "Beatrice isn't honest with her feelings at all. I hope she isn't too much for you to handle."

Ryuzu: "But she is too much for me. She's being so kind to someone like me. And I'm the one who's always making Beatrice-sama upset... I even worry if she might hate me."

Roswaal: “You are fine. Beatrice’s complaints aren’t credible at all. If she truly hated you, she wouldn’t be finding all sorts of excuses to come along.”

“Would she?”, Ryuzu thought, tilting her head. Whenever Beatrice was with Ryuzu, she’d always be complaining, and she’d always have something to say about everything Ryuzu did. That was all Ryuzu saw of her, so even when someone told her that Beatrice didn’t actually hate her, she had trouble believing it.

Ryuzu and most of the residents of the Sanctuary were often chosen as the targets of the hatred and malice of the outside world. Beatrice’s attitude was overwhelmingly tender compared to what Ryuzu knew, and it was even laced with a certain warmth, but mean was still mean.

Roswaal: “...I hope someday, you two would understand that as well.”

Seeing Ryuzu fall silent, Roswaal muttered sadly.

At the sight of the sad smile rising onto Roswaal’s lips, Ryuzu shuddered, wondering if she had upset him. But before she could say anything to salvage the situation, Roswaal blinked his yellow eyes as if having spotted something.

Roswaal: “Ah! Teacher! I heard you were here and came flying over in a heartbeat!”

Flinging up his hands and utterly discarding his previously mature attitude, Roswaal started running with an expression of childish glee. Ryuzu only watched as he ran right past her and towards a woman standing in the distance— Echidna. Seeing Roswaal dashing towards her with his face beaming with glee, Echidna slightly raised her brows.

Echidna: “Roswaal, huh? I don’t remember ever allowing you to call me Teacher.”

Roswaal: “Today, I’ll definitely change your mind about that. I can now confidently perform the assignment you gave me last time, balancing four types of Mana at equal concentration and producing rainbow-colored Mana— And by my own efforts, I’ve reached the point where I can add the remaining two as well. What do you think?”

Echidna: “You self-studied to the point where you can bind all six? My, my... I guess you can call that a foreboding rate of progression and nothing short of obsession. I’m sure in a bind now.”

It was a rare sight to see Echidna surprised.

At least, this was the first time Ryuzu had ever seen it. Roswaal pumped up his chest in pride as he waited for Echidna's response. Even Ryuzu, who was younger than him, found this adorable. His attitude and gaze, no matter how you looked at it, was overflowing with unreserved admiration for Echidna—as well as sentiments that went beyond admiration.

Beatrice: “Why are you just standing there doing nothing, I suppose?”

Ryuzu: “Ah... Beatrice-sama.”

While watching those two from a distance, Ryuzu suddenly found Beatrice next to her, staring at the side of her face. Unwittingly taking a step back, she saw Beatrice with her arms folded as usual, giving her a snort.

Beatrice: “You are gawking again. Just as rude as ever, in fact.”

Ryuzu: “P—please forgive me. I apologize for my insolence.”

Berated like this, Ryuzu shrank up, ashamed of her own shameless behavior. But seeing Ryuzu's apology, Beatrice's brows furrowed even further.

If only she smiled, or relaxed her lips, Beatrice's face would give off a gentle impression. And so, the fact that her callous behavior was putting such an expression on Beatrice's face was truly inexcusable.

Beatrice: “How long do you intend to keep sulking like that, I suppose? It's dismal. If you have time to space out toting that laundry basket, you ought to hurry up and get to your next chore.”

Ryuzu: “Y—yes. That's what I'll do. Please excuse me.”

Giving the unsparing Beatrice a bow, Ryuzu scrambled to leave the scene. But just as she began to speedily walk off, she noticed Beatrice picking up her dress, following behind her.

Ryuzu: “Beatrice-sama...?”

Beatrice: “It's nothing, I suppose. Just killing time, in fact.”

Seeing Ryuzu turn around, Beatrice gave a nonchalant reply. But just as Ryuzu was about to turn away, she remembered her conversation with Roswaal. That youth had insisted that Beatrice didn't dislike talking with her at all, but—

Ryuzu: "Beatrice-sama... Would you like to help me fold the laundry?"

Beatrice: "...Wha—?"

At Ryuzu's abrupt request for her to help with her chores, Beatrice let out a displeased groan.

Seeing Beatrice's eyes open wide and her expression shift into shock and even indignation, Ryuzu immediately regretted trusting Roswaal.

Beatrice: "—But well, if you absolutely can't handle it by yourself... then Betty has no choice but to help you, I suppose."

Ryuzu: "Huh?"

Beatrice: "I'm not saying it again, in fact. Come on, get going, I suppose."

Saying this, Beatrice scuttled past Ryuzu, who had unwittingly stopped in her tracks. The moment Beatrice passed her, Ryuzu saw that her lips were half softened because of astonishment, and half because of some other emotion.

Suddenly feeling a gush of warmth inside, Ryuzu caught up to Beatrice who had purposefully slowed her steps. Then, peeking at Beatrice's face,

Ryuzu: "Would you... like to hold a small amount of the laundry?"

Beatrice: "Don't push your luck— But since I've no choice... just a small amount, I suppose."

Saying this with a somewhat unwilling expression, Beatrice offered Ryuzu her hand.



Arc 4 Chapter 102 - Recollections Lost to Memory

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 13, Chapter 4 “Lies, Liars, and Con Artists”, Part 7 (loosely adapted), and Volume 14, Chapter 1 “—Journey of Memories”, Part 6

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Complete](#)

—Finding the seal turned out to be a lot easier than expected.

Emilia: “So... this is the *Siel*¹⁵⁷?”

Young Emilia, seeing the strange object before her, blinked her amethyst eyes and tilted her head.

In front of Emilia’s eyes, deep in the depths of the depths of the forest, was a peculiar door standing in the middle of a clearing surrounded by trees. Though it was certainly a door, it was not connected to any building, and even when she circled behind it, there was nothing there. It was merely a door standing in the middle of the forest, towering over the young Emilia.

Emilia: “Why doesn’t it fall over...?”

Finding this strange, she pushed on the door, but it did not open, nor moved a single inch. Naturally, Emilia’s scrawny arms weren’t strong enough to topple it, and the door effortlessly withstood her push as it would a light breeze.

The double-door seemed to be made of wood, but the cold it conveyed by touch was closer to that of ice. The feel of its surface was smooth, inexplicably like polished stone. In the center of the double-door was an ancient lock with a keyhole as wide as Emilia’s palm. She couldn’t imagine who could fit a key that big inside their pockets.

¹⁵⁷ Emilia mispronounces “fuuin” (封印) as “fu-in” (フーイン). Let’s keep that adorable childish mispronunciation because why not.

Emilia: “Weird...”

Tapping the door with the back of her hand, she confirmed that despite its firmness, the noise it made was dull. So now that she actually found it, what does it mean? Emilia tilted her head.

Emilia: “Say... What could it be...?”

???: “———”

The dim specks of light circled around Emilia’s head as she sought their advice. Since encountering them in the Princess Room, Emilia had been confiding in the fairies of the forest, and when she told them she wanted to find the *Siel*, they found this place in no time.

Though they were the ones who led her here, they didn’t seem to know the seal’s significance either. And even if they did know, they couldn’t speak, so they’d still have no way of communicating it to Emilia.

Emilia: “Don’t know... So boring. But at least I found it. Clap clap clap.”

Clapping her hands applauding herself, Emilia gave a big nod and looked the seal over front and back.

Now, if they ever find out that she was slipping out of the Princess Room, she’ll have her trump card ready. On the unlikely possibility mommy Fortuna and the adults catch onto Emilia’s great escapes, she’ll tell them she knows about the seal, and although she doesn’t really understand how, that’ll probably put them on equal footing.

Not that she could remember what compelled her to come up with this plan in the first place.

Emilia: “Hmph. It’s all Mommy Fortuna and everyone’s fault. It’s all Juice’s fault.”

Remembering that tall, black-robed man, Emilia stuck out her tongue in his absence.

He was the only person other than Emilia who could elicit that secret expression from Fortuna. Although she knew he wasn’t a bad person, he was her enemy, nonetheless. So far, she had never faced him directly, but should Fortuna ever present her with an opportunity to meet him, Emilia was determined to give his feet a good stomping.

Emilia: “The fairies will fly at his face, then when he’s confused, I’ll stomp at his feet. And I’ll stomp with both feet at once. And I’ll stomp with my heels... But that’ll probably hurt, I better use my toes.”

Even in war, she didn’t forget to insert a wisp of kindness into her ruthless plans.

Having the fairies watch for any signs of the enemy while she brooded on her cold-blooded battleplans, Emilia left the forests’ depths and began sneaking back to the village.

Unlike when she was slipping out of the Princess Room, this was Emilia’s free playtime. Fortuna would be away at this hour, checking on the forest’s barrier, leaving the elderly and the children of Emilia’s age in the village.

The elders couldn’t follow Emilia on her great adventures, and, for some reason, the children would always avoid coming near her. This did make Emilia feel a little lonely, but whenever she felt this way, Fortuna would put all her energy into playing with her to help her forget all about it. And so, it didn’t bother her too much that she couldn’t play with the other children.

Emilia: “And I bet I’m the only one who knows about the *Siel*.”

She alone knew something that nobody else did.

With that petty sense of superiority propping up Emilia’s petty sense of self-importance, she pumped out her chest and pressed on towards the village with the fairies leading the way.

Her destination was home. Today, she’ll draw to her heart’s content and run her brush all over the abnormally large stack of paper mommy Fortuna had prepared for her.

Emilia: “The artist feels like drawing a red sky, and a white forest today— Huh?”

While miming the motion of slapping paint onto her canvas, Emilia suddenly noticed the fairies’ movements becoming irregular. She squinted one of her eyes, following their movements as they veered off the path and disappeared into the bushes.

Emilia: “I sense trouble’s afoot...!”

The fairies would usually disappear into particles of light, but this time, they chose to hide in the undergrowth. Emilia determined that this either meant trouble was coming, or they wanted her to follow them.

Going off the path and into the shrubs, she slid through the foliage a little taller than she was. And after passing between the trees with her long silver hair catching again and again in the branches, there—

???: “Well this is quite the predicament... The promised time will end up being delayed¹⁵⁸.”

—In the dark forest, on a narrow trail, she saw a distressed man leaning against a skinny tree.

Emilia: “—Ah!”

Emilia unwittingly yelped and immediately covered her hands over her mouth. But it was a high-pitched voice in a silent forest. The sound reached the man’s ears and drew his attention.

???: “Who is there?”

The man tilted his head and looked towards Emilia’s thicket.

He had meek features and evenly trimmed green hair. His face was skinny, while his body gave off a lean but sturdy impression. He was tall, taller than Fortuna, someone who Emilia had to look up to get a gaze of, and taller than the foliage Emilia would have to desperately jump to take a peek at him.

This familiar man was none other than Emilia’s detested foe, Juice.

Juice: “———”

As he wordlessly stared at the thicket, Emilia clutched her head, resigned to the fact that he was not going to let this pass.

¹⁵⁸ It is unclear if this phrase has a deeper meaning, as it could also mean “I/It’ll be late for the appointed time”, which was how TranslationChicken did it. If anyone has Japanese skills, the original phrase is “約束の時間に遅れてしまう”.

What was actually happening was, with her clutching her head and so facing backwards, Emilia's bum was protruding from the thicket and Juice could see it entirely. But Emilia did not realize this, and Juice did not point it out.

Dejected, Emilia awkwardly poked her face out of the thicket.

Juice: "My my, a darling young lady has app... Hk!"

A gentle smile rose on Juice's face as he saw Emilia, when his shock cut off his sentence half-way.

His eyes shot open and his lips trembled as he stared at Emilia. Being watched by that gaze was strangely uncomfortable. Part of it was because Emilia still saw him as an enemy, and part of it because she could not decipher the complex emotions instilled within his gaze.

Juice: "Young miss, would... No, you couldn't be, that's impossib..."

Emilia: "——"

His voice trembled as he shook his head as if witnessing something unbelievable. Emilia timidly looked up at him, saw the fragile expression on his face, and found it heartbreaking.

He looked like a lost child, or someone who had been walking through pitch darkness, only now seeing the light— He held an expression at once precarious and dream-like, which made Emilia forget everything she had ever felt towards him.

Emilia: "...Juice, are you alright?"

Juice: "—! Aaah, aaaaah, AAAAAAAAAAAHH..."

Emilia walked up to him, clutched the hem of his black robe, and asked him.

That same instant, Juice's expression further disintegrated. His spine trembled as if a bolt of lightning had passed through him from Emilia's fingertips, and he fell to his knees.

Emilia couldn't help but shudder as she saw this. Juice was on his knees, bent over, at the same eye-level as Emilia's. From his eyes, an endless flood of tears spouted. The unstoppable stream of tears

birthed rivers on Juice's face. This was the first time Emilia had seen a grown-up cry, and all she could do was hold her breath and watch.

Taking hold of Emilia's petrified hand, Juice looked straight into her amethyst eyes.

Juice: "I... I'm fine... Yes, yes! I'm more than alright. There isn't... any problem at all... I—I... I've just, I've just been saved more than I could ever have dreamed."

Emilia: "You, have...? If you feel saved, why are you crying?"

Juice: "I'm not... crying because I'm sad... These are tears of joy, of happiness, of bliss... Such tears of happiness... do exist. That's s—s—something you... you guys have t—taught me... and so..."

His trembling fingers spoke volumes of his overwhelming emotions, and Emilia felt no urge to shake them away. She merely placed her free hand over the hand that was grasping hers. Juice bowed his head low, sending teardrops dripping to the ground. Irresistible sobs repeated in his throat, while the tears of bliss he spoke of continued to flow.

—So people could also cry because they are happy? Then, does that mean he's happy right now?

Emilia: "You are crying, because you are happy...?"

She felt like she could understand. Some nights, Emilia would find herself sleepless and alone. Whenever that happened, she would climb into Fortuna's bed, cradle herself in her mother's arms, and pass the time in warmth until the dawn came. Emilia would be liberated from her unease, wrapped in happiness, even come close to tears. What Juice was feeling now must be similar to what she had felt back then.

Maybe Emilia was doing for him what mommy Fortuna had done for her.

Emilia: "It's alright, Juice. It's alright. Everything's alright."

Juice: "———Hk."

Consolingly, Emilia patted Juice's head. A quake shocked through his body as Emilia held the downcast Juice against her little chest. His sobs transmitted into her bosom, their heat passing into her body.

She had been planning to stomp on his toes before, but somehow, they wound up here.

What an impossible guy. What a hopeless enemy. How could she bring herself to do something awful to someone who's crying? Surely, Fortuna would forgive her and understand that there was no helping it.

Emilia: "It's too lonely to cry all by yourself."

Once Juice finishes crying, they'll return to the village hand-in-hand, and she'll have no choice but to tell mommy Fortuna.

About her stroll in the depths of the forest, and about the grown-up who was crying.



Illustration from Volume 14, coloring by Setowi ([source](#))

Because once two people have shared a secret together, they are no longer enemies, but something like friends.

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—Leaning against the hard surface at her back, Emilia returned from her momentary lapse of consciousness. She shook her head, passed her fingers through her silver hair, and grimaced at the shrill, incessant ringing in her ears.

What was that brief dream she just had? Those scenes never existed in Emilia's memory. At least they shouldn't have.

Yet that unfamiliar sight had burst out as if she had actually witnessed it before. The cast were all people she knew, and she herself definitely participated in the production, but the scenes they were performing were entirely unknown to her.

She knew Fortuna, knew Juice, knew the fairies, and knew her young self.

But she did not remember those scenes, those unknown episodes, nor those conversations absent from her memory.

Spattering, overflowing, images Emilia could not recognize. The Sealing Door. Her escapes from the Princess Room. The fairies' guidance. Juice and his black-robos' true identities. Fortuna's last words to Emilia.

Emilia: "—Aah, hk."

A sudden, splitting pain sliced into Emilia's brain. Roughly wiping her tears with her sleeve, the pale skin around her eyes swelled red as she sighed.

Ever since her Contract with Puck terminated, those memories have been surfacing one after another in Emilia's mind. She had absolutely no idea what they meant. But she knew they weren't just meaningless, baseless delusions.

In fact, the core of Emilia's heart was neither rejecting nor distancing itself from those memories.

Because she did know. Deep in Emilia's heart, she knew those scenes.

Does that mean those scenes really happened? And, if so, why weren't they in Emilia's head before?

The past she had witnessed in her Trial—

—The memory of the forest buried in snow, where the insults and malice Fortuna flung upon her made her want to shriek and scream... Something that linked decisively to that moment was missing from Emilia's memory.

Was that missing link hidden somewhere in this sea of memories? If so, then Emilia would have to delve deeper, dredge the depths, and discover what had drowned.

Emilia: "Have to... find it fast..."

Her head was aching. Her body was heavy. Her vision was failing, and her every muscle was sapped of strength.

But still, Emilia must lean against the wall, prop herself back up, and keep going.

Slowly, steadily, dragging her heavy body, heading deeper and deeper into the darkness, on the verge of tears and alone, she pressed on.

All alone.

Arc 4 Chapter 103 - Genesis of Sanctuary and the Beginning of Collapse

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 14, Chapter 1 “—Journey of Memories”, Parts 4-9

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#)

Theta: “These memories are fragmented, but I did my best to sort out the chronology. I think... that this is how they flow together, more or less...”

Subaru: “...”

Subaru met Theta’s uncertain words with silence.

For he could only choose silence. The information-load was far too heavy, and he needed to organize it before he could come up with anything to say.

The founding of Sanctuary, and the era in which the girl named Ryuzu Meyer still lived— would have been four-hundred years ago, when beings called Witches roamed free. And when the Witch of Greed, Echidna, still walked this earth.

Subaru: “Honestly, I can’t imagine a time when Echidna was just wandering around the place like a normal person.”

Theta: “The Witch-sama’s presence must feel distant to you, Su-bo, because you have never lived in that era. But actually, even for me, I can’t say I truly knew her despite feeling like I’ve spent all that time around her.”

Subaru: “When you talk about things you vaguely know about as if you actually lived them, it feels like you’re on the first step to senility. But anyway... did Echidna visit the Sanctuary often?”

Theta: “Those aren’t my real memories, but judging from the scenes I witnessed and the conversations we had, her visits must’ve been rather frequent.”

Unlike Theta, who had seen those memories, all of it still lacked a sense of reality for Subaru who was merely hearing about them second-hand.

But if there were anything about what Theta said that was bothering him, it would of course be—

Subaru: “Beatrice and Roswaal... were in the Sanctuary 400 years ago...?”

Theta: “Beatrice-sama, as I said, was like Echidna-sama’s daughter. And as for Ros-bo, the Ros-bo in my story was the founder of the House of Mathers... the first-generation Roswaal who had set the rise of the Mathers household in motion. The name Roswaal was just inherited down the line.”

Subaru: “...Was he close with Beako?”

Theta: “From what I could tell, he had a charming relationship with her.”

While listening to Theta’s account, Subaru’s thoughts turned to Beatrice.

Perhaps that girl hadn’t changed a bit at all during the course of four-hundred years and had always been curt and dishonest with her feelings. Even now, four-hundred years later, that attitude remained the same. Never allowing anyone to peek into her world, she continued to hide everything inside that little body of hers.

Thinking of that girl lingering alone in the Forbidden Library, a keen pain sliced across Subaru’s chest. Pressing a hand to his breast to hold back that pain, Subaru shook his head.

Subaru: “I’m surprised Echidna would bring Beatrice along with her. Judging from our conversations, I didn’t think she felt any kind of maternal love for Beatrice.”

Theta: “I’ve never had a chance to meet the Witch-sama myself. But from what I’ve seen of Ryuzu Meyer’s memories, I feel that there’s a sense of humanity to the great Witch-sama.”

Subaru: “Somehow, I kinda agree with you there.”

It was indeed quite different from Subaru's impression of Echidna. Yet, four-hundred years had gone by, and life and death stood between then and now. Maybe it wouldn't be too strange if her perspective on life had changed during her time in that Citadel of Dreams.

Subaru: "I thought our break-up was pretty final... but I'm still placing my hopes in her, huh..."

Once again, he was reminded of his own hopelessness.

This was different from Rem and Ram. Echidna understood Subaru's feelings and hopes and knowingly trampled over them all the same. There can be no future in which he'd take her hand now.

Subaru: "Anyway, your stories so far have just been charming reminiscences of the past. That doesn't sound like the kind of terrible secret you'd go out of your way to hide from everyone."

Theta: "-----"

Subaru: "So, please tell me what came next. What on earth happened in that seemingly idyllic Sanctuary?"

Subaru lowered his voice, asking, as Theta brought her already-cold tea to her lips. She mumbled "Tastes terrible..." under her breath, and,

Theta: "What happened, is it...?"

Subaru: "-----"

Theta: "What happened was collapse. And then, I learned the true reason the Sanctuary was created."

Subaru: "The true... reason...?"

Subaru unwittingly swallowed his breath at those words, while Theta merely nodded. And, as if once again opening the lid on her memories, she narrowed her eyes.

Theta: "Both the great Witch-sama and the first Roswaal were inside the Sanctuary at the time. Something ominous and strange was approaching, and not just myself, but everyone inside the Sanctuary had sensed this."

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—The air hung taut and heavy, giving Ryuzu the illusion her throat was parched.

Roswaal: “We have to get out of this place, now. The preparations aren’t ready— If that thing finds the Sanctuary’s location, all our plans will be for naught.”

Echidna: “———”

Roswaal: “Teacher! We are wasting valuable time here! That thing... That thing will be here any moment!”

Anxiously slamming his hand on the table in the little cabin, the slender-faced youth shouted. An urgent apprehension was carved into that usually temperate and graceful youth’s expression.

Hearing his plea, the Witch Echidna quietly closed her eyes and folded her arms. Faced with her silence, the youth lunged forward, waving his arms to reiterate his petition.

Roswaal: “There’s no time to hesitate! That thing’s power is overwhelming! I’m still not strong enough to protect you, Teacher...! If you ask me to be your shield, I will gladly be your shield. But when we have no means of fighting against that thing, even if I defend you with my life, it’d be completely futile...”

Echidna: “There is a way— To a certain extent, I had prepared for this.”

Cutting off the youth— Roswaal’s words, Echidna opened her eyes, staring at the grains of the wooden tabletop.

Hearing this, “Guh...” Roswaal spilled an astounded sigh while Echidna quietly shook her head.

Echidna: “Judging by my repeated inspections of the Sanctuary, I believe the conditions are in place for the barrier to hold with a high probability of success.”

Roswaal: “Th—then...!”

Echidna: “—But we are missing the core to activate the barrier.”

Roswaal: “———”

For a moment, a flash of hope brightened Roswaal’s expression before it was extinguished by Echidna’s pained voice once more.

Echidna: “The barrier cannot be activate without its core. And without the barrier, we cannot repel that thing from this place. If we can’t secure a safe zone, we’ll be annihilated as soon as we are found.”

Roswaal: “We spent all this time preparing the Sanctuary... we’ve come so far, and yet... with just one step away!”

Overwhelmed with vexation, Roswaal slammed his fist on the table.

The legs of the old table creaked as blood seeped from Roswaal’s hand.

Silence descended on the small cabin. Time slowed to a standstill as a viscous, heavy atmosphere permeated the room.

And it was there, that a girl timidly raised her hand.

Ryuzu: “Um, would I be any good... as the barrier’s core?”

Echidna: “———”

Ryuzu: “I heard before that this is possible. That I meet the conditions for your barrier, Echidna-sama... And that was why you’ve been paying special attention to me.”

Echidna: “——Did Beatrice tell you this?”

Ryuzu: “Yes.”

Ryuzu Meyer nodded in quiet determination with her long, pink hair flowing. The girl’s face was tense with resolve as she stared straight at the expressionless Echidna.

Ryuzu: “Beatrice-sama said that you’ve already confirmed that I’m a perfect match. All the Mana you have extracted over these past few months was precisely for this purpose, was it not?”

After a brief silence, Echidna drew in her chin and nodded to Ryuzu’s question.

Echidna: “Indeed, you are very suitable for the creation of the barrier. It’d be possible to maintain the barrier if we keep you inside the Sanctuary. That much is well established. With just a little more time to adapt the Sanctuary’s lands to your Mana, it would’ve been possible.”

Ryuzu: “In other words, it isn’t possible now?”

Roswaal: “It’s not just a simple barrier. This barrier must be indestructible. We need to proceed with the utmost caution and discretion. Years of effort have gone into gathering half-bloods inside the Sanctuary to provide the conditions for the barrier. And you... were the decisive lynchpin of this plan. But...”

Trailing off there, Roswaal ruefully gritted his teeth.

Though Ryuzu didn’t know the details, she could tell that even this ingenious duo of Echidna and Roswaal were helpless in the face of such obstacles. Is there really nothing they can do?

—There has to be something. That was what Ryuzu’s brief life-experience told her.

Ryuzu: “Isn’t there something more drastic we can try?”

Echidna: “———”

Ryuzu: “...You saved me, Echidna-sama and Roswaal-sama. Coming to this land, I was given a life where I wouldn’t have to be afraid of being persecuted or shunned, and I was happy. If I could do anything to repay you for the time I was given, I’m certain that’s my life’s purpose.”

Little-by-little, she spilled the contents of her heart.

Watching Ryuzu squeeze her little white hands even whiter as she spoke, Echidna’s black irises froze, losing all of their warmth. Instead, it was Roswaal, standing beside her, who found himself beset by a torrent of complex emotions.

Roswaal: “T—Teacher...”

It wasn’t a call asking Echidna for her decision. Rather, it was a call filled with the slightly different nuance of “you couldn’t possibly do this”. Whatever it may have been, it was like the pulling of a trigger.

Echidna: “—If we crystallize your Od and make it the core of the Sanctuary, we can drastically shorten the process for the land to adapt to your Mana. And the barrier will be complete.”

Ryuzu: “If we do this, will the Sanctuary be saved?”

Echidna: “It’ll give us a chance to survive the violence of the impending threat. If that could buy us some time, I should be able to devise some countermeasures.”

Ryuzu: “———”

Echidna did not give a consolatory answer. She neither made any wishful predictions, nor offered any words of comfort.

But if Echidna judged that it was possible, then, for sure, it can be done. In other words, by offering her life here, she would be able to protect this place. By sacrificing herself as the repayment of her debt, they will certainly succeed.

Ryuzu: “...When do we start?”

Echidna: “—I’d like to start preparing immediately, if possible. I will ready the Anchor for the crystallization process and assemble the spell. As for delaying the approaching threat...”

Roswaal: “Leave that to me. I will do everything in my power to stall it... And, Ryuzu-kun.”

Roswaal lifted his face, lined with tragic resolve. Not a hint of weakness or hesitation remained on his expression. He merely stared into Ryuzu’s determined eyes, and,

Roswaal: “I’m sorry. Please help Teacher. do what I cannot do for her.”

Ryuzu: “Don’t be, Roswaal-sama. you’ve already given me a life of irreplaceable happiness. For that, I have nothing but gratitude, so how could I resent you?”

Holding her hand to her chest, Ryuzu shook her head.

Roswaal drew in a small breath, and, sighing, he looked to Echidna.

Roswaal: “I’ll be off. Please make the preparations... And please summon Beatrice, Teacher.”

Echidna: "...Maybe it'd be better if Beatrice doesn't know about this?"

Roswaal: "If we don't call her here now, she will resent us for the rest of her life, Teacher... Although, she probably still will even if we do call her."

Echidna: "Is that right... I see. I'll call her in a moment."

Seeing Echidna's nod, Roswaal headed out of the cabin. On the way, he placed his hand on Ryuzu's shoulder and gave a single, firm squeeze. The dull pain from his grip conveyed the entirety of Roswaal's regrets and reluctance. And, sensing this, Ryuzu shut her eyes.

Ryuzu: "...Beatrice-sama."

She softly whispered.

As the thought of that girl who wasn't here tenderly tormented Ryuzu's heart.

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Again, the scene changed.

Ryuzu: "——"

—Witnessing such overwhelming power, an emotion more terrifying than imminent death budded in Ryuzu's chest.

Roswaal: "—Kh, puh."

Accompanied by excruciating coughs, clots of blood came spraying from Roswaal's lips as his body flew parallel to the ground. Watching him land on his shoulder, sweeping up dust clouds as he tumbled, Ryuzu could only stand there, forgetting to breathe.

Wielding six-colored magic, Roswaal A. Mathers had reached the highest level of the magic arts in only his mid-teens. He could scour the earth with devastating flames, cut into stone cliffs with blades of wind,

birth water to force back the flow of great rivers, and command soil and stone to raise castles from the ground.

Yet, even with his immense powers, he stood no chance against this overwhelming existence.

???: "...Still want to keep going?"

A youth with auburn hair and sluggish bearing walked towards him, shaking his head.

He seemed about the same age as Roswaal. His blackish-auburn bangs reached down to his eyebrows, and one might even mistake his attractive features for a woman's. His dark-hued eyes were squinting as if sleepy, and a white shirt with black pants formed his simple attire.

—With every step he took, he'd playfully kick a pebble, each one shooting towards Roswaal sending blood spraying from his body. Then another. And another.

Roswaal: "Kh! Gah! Pfu!"

???: "Annoying. Meddlesome. Dismal. Irritating. Wretched. Depressing."

The youth gloomily grumbled, but with every mutter and every step forward, Roswaal's cries intensified as the sound of cracking bones were heard by the distant Ryuzu. Roswaal's body, collapsed on the ground, looked as if it was being crushed into the earth by the air itself. In fact, his limbs were already half buried in the ground, their flesh rupturing as his bloodshot eyes overflowed with crimson tears.

???: "Can you stop already? You've tried. You can't win against me, but you've tried and tried. Trying is enough, isn't it...? No matter how hard you try, it's pointless."

Roswaal: "Wh... at are y... blathering about... I'll definitely... stop you here... Kha! Aaaaagh! Ghaaaaaagh!!"

???: "Haaa... My head's killing me. Nauseates my chest. Dampens my soul."

Hearing Roswaal reject his call to surrender, the youth bent his knees and squatted down. Expelling a deep sigh, he touched the ground as if caressing it. And, with the motion of the youth's fingertips, Roswaal's limbs creaked to the sound of tearing flesh and harrowing shrieks.

???: “I didn’t want this. I was trying to avoid this. I never tried to avoid anything so badly in my life. It’s just the worst, the worst, the worst of the worst of the worst— Truly, depressing.”

Roswaal: “Gaaaaah, aaaaaaaaaaaaaaagh— Hk!”

At the end of the youth’s contagiously despairing speech, with the utterance of that decisive word, Roswaal’s body caved under the unbearable pressure.

The center of his body was flattened, sending profuse blood gushing from his mouth as if he was going to cough out his organs. Roswaal’s eyes rolled white to the convulsion of his limbs. The young wizard’s life now hung by a thread as the price for fighting on to the end.

???: “Aaaa, aaa, aaaaaah? What is this? Whaaaat is this? Look at this. Just look at this. Aaaaah, I really didn’t want to do this. I feel sick. I feel dismal. My head feels heavy. How depressing. Depressing, depressing, depress depress depress depress depress depressing—”

Roswaal was no longer screaming, and all that remained was the sound of dripping blood. Taking a languid glance at Roswaal’s mangled body, the youth went on gloomily grumbling.

All the while, Ryuzu, watching Roswaal’s gruesome end and the uncanny youth who had brought it about, only now remembered to breathe.

Ryuzu: “—Haaaaa.”

Her lungs, strained to their limits, scrambled to pump oxygen to her brain. After replenishing her body’s oxygen by drawing a single breath, she forced herself to fall silent once more, afraid that even the slightest disturbance in the air might elicit the youth’s attention.

Despite watching her benefactor being cruelly mutilated before her eyes, she chose self-preservation over revenge, even though she had no idea why she was so attached to her worthless life.

???: “Ooooooh? Is there maybe someone there?”

Ryuzu: “—Hk!”

As if proving Ryuzu’s worries, the youth tilted his head and looked in her direction.

A short distance away from the battle, on the other side of the village square, Ryuzu was watching from a small cabin, peeking through a knot in one of the boards of the wooden wall. She shuddered at the thought that the youth might've seen her behind such a small gap so far away. The knot was no bigger than the forehead of a cat. There was no way he could have noticed her.

Yet, the youth was walking over without the slightest hint of uncertainty.

???: "Iiiii'm not a quarrelsome person. I don't think any gooooood is going to come from killing everyone... If you could save me the trouble, I'd really appreciate it."

Ryuzu: "...Eep."

???: "Hmmmmmm. Well somewhere in that direction... Should I just demolish the whole thing? Ugh, I really just want to drop everything and go home. So nauseating. So dismal. So depressing."

The youth reached his hand towards the cabin and pronounced this lurid death-sentence.

A chill instantly crawled up Ryuzu's spine as a piercing pain wracked through her head like her skull was being stabbed by needles. Tears swelled in the corners of her eyes as she desperately held back the unbearable shriek stuck in her throat. At this rate, an invisible weight would crush every bone in Ryuzu's little body—

Roswaal: "AL... GOA!!"

Literally spewing blood as he roared, an explosion of flame covered the entire village square in crimson. Feeling its heat roasting her face despite being some distance away, Ryuzu watched the searing flames charge from Roswaal's palm straight for the youth's back.

???: "———"

Even this youth was compelled to turn around as he sensed the overwhelming wave of heat. But what he saw as he turned was an inferno far beyond the realm of human understanding.

Without offering the slightest resistance, the youth's body was swallowed by the onslaught of those blinding flames—

???: "I hate sweating— It's depressing."

—Or he would have been, if the youth hadn't shot down the converging scarlet Mana just an instant before he could be engulfed.

The sweltering fireball that should have incinerated the youth was wiped from the world without even a fiery burst to mark its demise, merely shrinking into a small red orb and rolling onto the ground.

Roswaal: "Ah... Uh... Guh..."

???: "It's still not gone, just how much power did you put into this? Don't keep making me use my powers. The more I do, the more I feel like I want to die."

The youth grumbled and tightly clenched his outstretched hand. As if obeying his gesture, the condensed red orb on the ground collapsed into itself. And, with a loud crack ringing through the broiling air, its energy dissipated into nothing.

Even the highest class of fire magic, Al Goa, did not damage him.

Roswaal, who had returned from the precipice of death for that final strike, fell speechless at this outcome. His desperate struggle was, as anyone could see, futile.

And Ryuzu, who had just narrowly escaped with her life, keenly understood that all this had accomplished was briefly postpone Roswaal's and her own inevitable death.

Roswaal: "You... demon... no... Warlock...!"

???: "I hate that name, it's dismal. You think I'm liiiiiike this because I enjoy it?"

Roswaal: "No matter how distorted your life is... or how limited your choices are... you are still the one who chose them. So don't play the victim here... Hector of Tristitia!¹⁵⁹"

Hector: "Ouch, the truth hurts, you know. I hooooooooonestly don't know what to do with you."

Walking to the fallen Roswaal's side, the youth crouched down and reached his hand towards Roswaal's head.

¹⁵⁹ Alternatives are Acedia, and Melancholy. The latter is boring, and the former is apparently wrong, being another name for Sloth.



Illustration from Volume 14, coloring by Setowi ([source](#))

Without touching him, he had already dealt this overwhelming damage. But if his fingertip were to touch him now, the invisible devastation would cause Roswaal's physical integrity to collapse.

Roswaal: "Guh... Ul—"

Hector: "You are too late, you won't make it, and I won't let you."

Watching Roswaal concentrate his Mana preparing to cast another spell, the youth callously pronounced. Then, his morbid fingertip made contact, sending irrevocable death into Roswaal's dying body.

Roswaal: "...Ul— guuuuuuuuuuuuh..."

Hector: "Bones, crushed. Organs, squashed. Heart, shattered. Hooooooooow do you lllllllike it?"

With that brief groan, Roswaal relinquished his final sigh.

Looking down at the completely motionless Roswaal, the youth patted his knees and stood up. Then, he turned around, directly facing the petrified Ryuzu.

And this time, without a warning, he held out his palm and released the invisible weight.

Ryuzu: "—Hk."

The cabin didn't even withstand it for a second.

The immense pressure from above easily overwhelmed the little cabin's resistance. If Ryuzu hadn't made her timely plunge to the ground, she would've been crushed to the ground with every joint in her body bending in a direction it was never meant to be bent.

Hector: "No resistance... So it's not Echidna, then? If it iiiiiisn't her... whateeeeeever."

Ryuzu: "—Uh, uuuuugh."

Hector: "Be crushed and drown in the dirt. Save me the trouble of digging your grave—"

Ryuzu felt the illusion of invisible hands pulling her up by her skin, peeling her off the ground. And just when she thought that this youth's distant utterance would be the last words she ever heard in this life, the pressure abruptly dissipated.

Roughly panting with profuse tears and saliva drenching her face, Ryuzu looked up, confused. And there, she saw, at the other end of her vision,

Echidna: "Guess I can't exactly say I made it just in time."

Hector: "Nooooooooope. Your disciple did his best to stall me and buy you time, though. Thanks to him, I got totally thrown off rhythm, and that really ruined my mood."

Echidna: "Your way of speaking really hasn't changed at all. You are just the same as when we last parted."

Hector: "Your know-it-all airs haven't changed either, I see. Why do you insist on such an uncuuuuute attitude? You were really cute once."

The youth shook his head, lamenting. Directly in front of him, standing between the youth and Ryuzu, was a lady of white dressed all in black— Echidna.

The Witch looked down at the fallen Roswaal and slightly narrowed her eyes.

Echidna: "This sight pains me more than I expected... As much as I hate to let anything interfere with my objectivity towards results."

Hector: "He'd be disappointed if you didn't show some emoouoooootions for him. Not that I care. But if you want to cry, I can give you some time. Even I am not that cruel."

Echidna: "Where did you get the gall to say such things?"

Their barbed exchange suggested that they knew each other, but their relationship was clearly not an amicable one. They steadily gauged their distance as they faced each other. Ryuzu did not doubt Echidna's strength, but she had equally believed in Roswaal, and he was easily crushed in the face of that overwhelming power.

With that established, Ryuzu could not assert that Echidna's backing gave her any peace of mind.

???: "—How long do you plan to keep lying there in that graceless position, I suppose?"

Ryuzu: "...Huh?"

Suddenly hearing this, Ryuzu looked up from the ground when a hand grabbed her from behind and pulled her up. Dragged by that force, Ryuzu squeaked as she turned around.

Behind her, was an adorable girl wearing her familiar, sour expression.

Ryuzu: “Bea... trice-sama...”

Beatrice: “This isn’t the time to be stammering in surprise. Let’s get out of here quickly while Mother is buying us time, I suppose.”

Ryuzu: “B—but... Roswaal-sama and Echidna-sama ordered me to wait here.”

Beatrice: “It was thanks to said Roswaal’s bungling that he realized you’re here, in fact. Enough, just follow Betty, I suppose. Mother was the one who instructed me to fetch you, in fact.”

Ryuzu: “Echidna-sama...”

Beatrice’s brows furrowed in irritation, but her expression remained tense. Even her usual haughty confidence seemed diminished in front of this inexplicable youth.

Nevertheless, she was still infinitely stronger than Ryuzu, who was even now curling into a little trembling ball.

Beatrice: “The preparations are in place. That’s what Mother said, I suppose. She said you’d understand if I told you that.”

Ryuzu: “—I... understand.”

Ryuzu held her breath and nodded at Echidna’s message. Beatrice narrowed her eyes, puzzled by Ryuzu’s reaction, but had no mind to probe into it.

A torrent of Mana was peaking behind them. The clash between Echidna and the youth was only a matter of time. No one could predict how this battle would go. And the only means to secure certain victory rested in Ryuzu’s choice.

Ryuzu: “Let’s go. Beatrice-sama, where are the preparations set?”

Beatrice: "...It's inside an old, decaying stone room, I suppose. I moved it there as Mother instructed me to, even with Betty's Door Crossing, it was no easy task, in fact."

Sticking an extra boast at the end, Beatrice led Ryuzu by the hand as they moved out. Following behind Beatrice's bouncing pigtails, Ryuzu took one last look at Echidna and bowed her head to the Witch's back.

—Surely, they would never speak again.

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The crystal was blue and transparent, so beautiful that Ryuzu trembled.

Beatrice: "Even if you think it's pretty, just don't touch it like an idiot. You'll be swallowed up if you do and become a part of the crystal, I suppose."

Momentarily forgetting where they were, Ryuzu spilled an amazed sigh. Next to her, Beatrice crossed her arms at Ryuzu's out-of-place demeanor and gave this warning. Suddenly called back from her daze, Ryuzu quickly pulled back her fingers.

Ryuzu: "Ah, s—sorry."

Beatrice: "Not like there's anything to apologize for... So, what do we do now, I suppose? Betty was only told to move the crystal and bring you here. Mother didn't say anything beyond that."

Ryuzu: "Beatrice-sama, how did you get this crystal here...?"

Beatrice: "For Betty, moving something without touching it is nothing at all, I suppose. Mother herself has praised the precision and range of my Door Crossing, in fact."

Beatrice's expression was dispassionate as always, but, sensing a hint of pride within, Ryuzu softened her cheeks. She had already grown accustomed to talking to Beatrice like this. In the beginning, she'd always take Beatrice at her word and feel like she wanted to crawl into a hole somewhere.

But over the time they've spent together, Ryuzu learned that this seemingly-imperious girl was actually surprisingly easy to get along with, and in fact, she was every bit the adorable girl she appeared to be, and someone she could smile and laugh with.

How nice it would be if she could just keep talking with Beatrice like this.

If only she could forget all about the calamity befalling the Sanctuary and the fate awaiting her— but that would be impossible.

Beatrice: "...? Your smile is incredibly unpleasant right now, in fact."

Beatrice pointed out, perhaps sensing the sadness that had slipped onto Ryuzu's face.

The fact that Beatrice could tell that her smile was different from usual was evidence that she'd been paying attention to her. As soon as Ryuzu realized this, tears popped out of the corners of her eyes.

Beatrice's eyes widened, and Ryuzu frantically wiped the tears off with her sleeve,

Ryuzu: "S—sorry... A grain... of sand got into my eye..."

Beatrice: "N—not that I care, I suppose— With things as they are, Betty can see this is not the place to be saying «don't worry», in fact."

Although Beatrice had misunderstood her, they were words of compassion all the same.

Ryuzu felt a warmth swell in the depths of her chest. Such was the strength Beatrice had given her, and it felt so grand that she could burst.

Ryuzu: "Beatrice-sama."

Beatrice: "What is it, I suppose. If you are going to take a while, Betty will go help Mother, in fact. And that Roswaal seems to be on the verge of death right now, guess if I don't help him, he's..."

Ryuzu: "Thank you, for always taking care of me. But— this is goodbye."

Beatrice: "—Huh?"

Listening to those vague words, Beatrice blinked her eyes, confused.

Inside the cold stone chamber, the two girls— Beatrice and Ryuzu stared at each other.

Beatrice blinked over and over, intently gazing back at Ryuzu. Beatrice's gaze was intense but warm, and Ryuzu did not look away.

Beatrice: "Goodbye? What do you mean, I suppose? Are you going to run away, in fact?"

Ryuzu: "No, that's not it. If I do run away and live, maybe someday I could still see you again. But this will be our final farewell. We'll probably never have another chance to talk to each other again."

Beatrice: "..."

Beatrice pursed her lips and peered deep into Ryuzu's eyes, searching for her true intentions. Seeing her confused for the first time, Ryuzu quietly chose her words.

Ryuzu: "Echidna-sama's preparations were for the barrier that will cover the Sanctuary. More time was needed for the barrier to take entrench itself in the Sanctuary's soil... But right now, we don't have enough time for that."

Beatrice: "Not enough time... Then the barrier can't be completed? Isn't that barrier the only way to drive that guy off, I suppose?"

Ryuzu: "That's right. I've seen with my own eyes how dangerous that man is. He's beyond dangerous. I know that's why Echidna-sama is risking everything to defeat him. And I think Roswaal-sama sacrificed himself because he knew it was the only way to save Echidna-sama."

Such was that youth's overwhelming power.

Ryuzu didn't know how the barrier's activation would help Echidna, or whether it'd be able to wipe out that monster's existence.

But there was one thing Echidna had assured her.

Ryuzu: "Echidna-sama promised me that if the barrier is activated, we'll be able to protect the Sanctuary... And so, I'm willing to give my life for that."

Beatrice: “D—don’t say such stupid things. Even if you give up your life... without any background in magic, what could you possibly...”

Beatrice’s eyes filled with panic as she hurriedly blurted out. But clever as she was, she had already reached the answer to her own question halfway through her sentence. Her eyes shot open in shock as she turned to the blue crystal looming beside them,

Beatrice: “If you bind yourself with the core of this crystal... with your Od as the centerpiece, spreading the barrier over the Sanctuary... it’ll no longer be necessary to acclimatize the soil...”

Ryuzu: “Yes. That’s what Echidna-sama said.”

It was the same conclusion that Echidna and Roswaal had reached before the attack.

Beatrice only stood there without a word. Ryuzu circled around her until she was in front of Beatrice’s view, and smiled.

Ryuzu: “You’ve confirmed my affinity to the Sanctuary’s Mana yourself... Beatrice-sama.”

Beatrice: “———Hk!”

Beatrice’s face sprang up at Ryuzu’s words.

She bit into her peach-colored lip until blood seeped from her flesh,

Beatrice: “N... No. Betty... Betty didn’t... Wait, that’s not, just wait, I suppose. Just wait here, in fact. B—Betty will speak to Mother, I suppose. Mother might act like that, but she absolutely coddles Betty, she’ll listen if I...”

Ryuzu: “There’s no time for that right now. We have to decide this very moment.”

Beatrice: “In that case, Betty will go help Mother straight away, in fact. If Mother and Betty team up, we can easily dispose of that guy, I suppose. Roswaal too, once I heal him it’ll be three of us...”

Beatrice shook her head in childish denial, but her words trailed off towards the end. Even she realized how unconvincing her own words were.

Beatrice was indeed amazing. Ryuzu was genuinely in awe of how this girl around her age could have reached such heights in magic, never slacking in her daily studies. She could juggle doting over her mother, quarrelling with Roswaal, practicing magic, and doing laundry and sewing and cooking with Ryuzu, all without a hitch.

This same Beatrice would understand the extent of her own abilities, as well as the unbridgeable gap between the enemy and herself.

She could not place her mother's life in danger for such a callous boast.

Beatrice: "—Or, we could use Betty's Door Crossing to get everyone away from here, in fact."

Ryuzu: "..."

Beatrice: "Right? That'll be enough, I suppose. It'll be a little hard, but Betty can definitely pull it off, in fact. While Mother holds him off, we'll gather up everyone in the Sanctuary and escape to Mother's mansion together, I suppose. We'll pick up Roswaal when we get the chance and close the door once Mother's through, then we'll have slipped away right under that guy's nose... Yeah, that's what we should do."

Ryuzu: "And once we've slipped away, won't we live in fear of being pursued by that person for the rest of our lives? If we abandon this place, where people who'd been ostracized by the entire world could finally live in safety and peace... To then go somewhere new, how long will it be before we can live happily like this again?"

Ryuzu shook her head at Beatrice's plan, her words gentle but stern.

Seeing the wounded look spreading across Beatrice's face, an intense pain ran through Ryuzu's chest. But she must trample over this girl's considerations and force her own way through.

Even if this cruel and selfish decision meant betraying the days they've spent together.

—As well as betraying all the memories they've shared.

Ryuzu: "Beatrice-sama. I love the Sanctuary. I'm truly glad I was able to live here. And I love seeing the smiles on the faces of everyone who lives here. So I don't want all of this to disappear."

Beatrice: “———”

Ryuzu: “I had a wonderful time here. So wonderful that I wondered if someone like myself, with tainted blood flowing through my veins, truly deserved this. And so, I’m already satisfied.”

Beatrice: “It’s not like that, I suppose... N—no matter what you think this place is, the real purpose of this place isn’t what you think at all...”

Ryuzu: “Yes. I know.”

Beatrice: “———Ah.”

Ryuzu nodded, as Beatrice suddenly looked as if she regretted saying what she did.

Ryuzu knew the true purpose of the Sanctuary. At least, she knew it wasn’t out of altruistic kindness that Echidna and Roswaal had gathered these persecuted people here.

This paradise where ostracized and despised people could live with their heads held high— did not exist for their sake, but, deep down, everyone still wanted to believe it. And now, it was no longer possible to see the bright facade of this place exclusively. She understood this, as much as it pained her.

Ryuzu: “The true purpose of this place is to deal with the person pursuing Echidna-sama, isn’t it?”

Beatrice: “...”

Ryuzu: “That is why this place exists, and why we were brought here, I understand that now.”

Beatrice: “Then...! If you already know, then why...”

Unable to understand, Beatrice shook her head.

In front of Beatrice’s pleading gaze, Ryuzu’s lips softened.

Ryuzu: “I don’t mind. In the beginning, that might’ve been all it was. But those happy days we’ve spent here weren’t just a part of Echidna-sama’s plans. The time I spent here, and all the conversations we’ve had, none of that was a part of some plan.”

Beatrice: “———”

Ryuzu: “What’s important isn’t how it began. It’s how it ends, and what we felt along the way.”

Beatrice: “———”

Ryuzu: “I was truly happy here. So I will do anything to protect this happiness. Please let me express my gratitude for everything you’ve done for me, Beatrice-sama.”

A distant boom echoed through the stone chamber. The ground shook and the atmosphere trembled in the wake of the clashes between Echidna and the youth in the center of the Sanctuary.

The fact it was steadily approaching made it clear Echidna was not succeeding.

Ryuzu: “———”

Closing her eyes, Ryuzu quietly confirmed her resolve. In front of her, Beatrice’s shoulders heaved up and down as she wracked her brain for something to say. Some magical words that would dissuade Ryuzu from her intention, overturn her decision, and change her mind.

But no such convenient magic existed in this world.

Ryuzu: “Beatrice-sama.”

Beatrice: “...What is it, I suppose.”

Ryuzu: “Please take care not to eat too many sweets.”

Beatrice: “———”

During tea-time, Beatrice would be shoving sweets into her mouth constantly. It’d be a shame if her adorable looks were ruined because she got fat. And she’d have to take care of her teeth as well.

Although she rarely showed it, she really is adorable when she smiles.

Turning around, Ryuzu wordlessly approached the blue crystal. The crystal was giving off a deep, alluring glow. If she touched it, she really would be swallowed by that light.

Would it hurt, and would she suffer?

Despite being prepared for the end, she had no idea in what form it would come. Simply put, it was an emotion known as fear.

Once she is swallowed by this light, she will make this place a true Sanctuary.

And if that genuine world would be a place where everyone was kind, and could live their lives in peace...

If Echidna and Beatrice would continue to watch over that Sanctuary for her...

Ryuzu: “———”

Suddenly, she felt a tug on her sleeve.

Ryuzu turned around and saw Beatrice standing right beside her. She was gazing at Ryuzu with an expression she had never seen from her before, her fingertips were clinging to her sleeve.

The strength in those clinging fingers was weak, and not even Beatrice knew what she was trying to do with this touch. She had merely reached out without thinking, and for a girl who would never be honest with her emotions, perhaps this was the only way to express her true feelings,

Ryuzu: “———”

Gently, Ryuzu picked off the fingers holding onto her sleeve. Feeling the warmth passing between their touching fingertips, Ryuzu smiled at the end.

Ryuzu: “Thank you— Goodbye, Betty.”

—With those final words, Ryuzu’s consciousness was swallowed into the blue light.

And vanished.

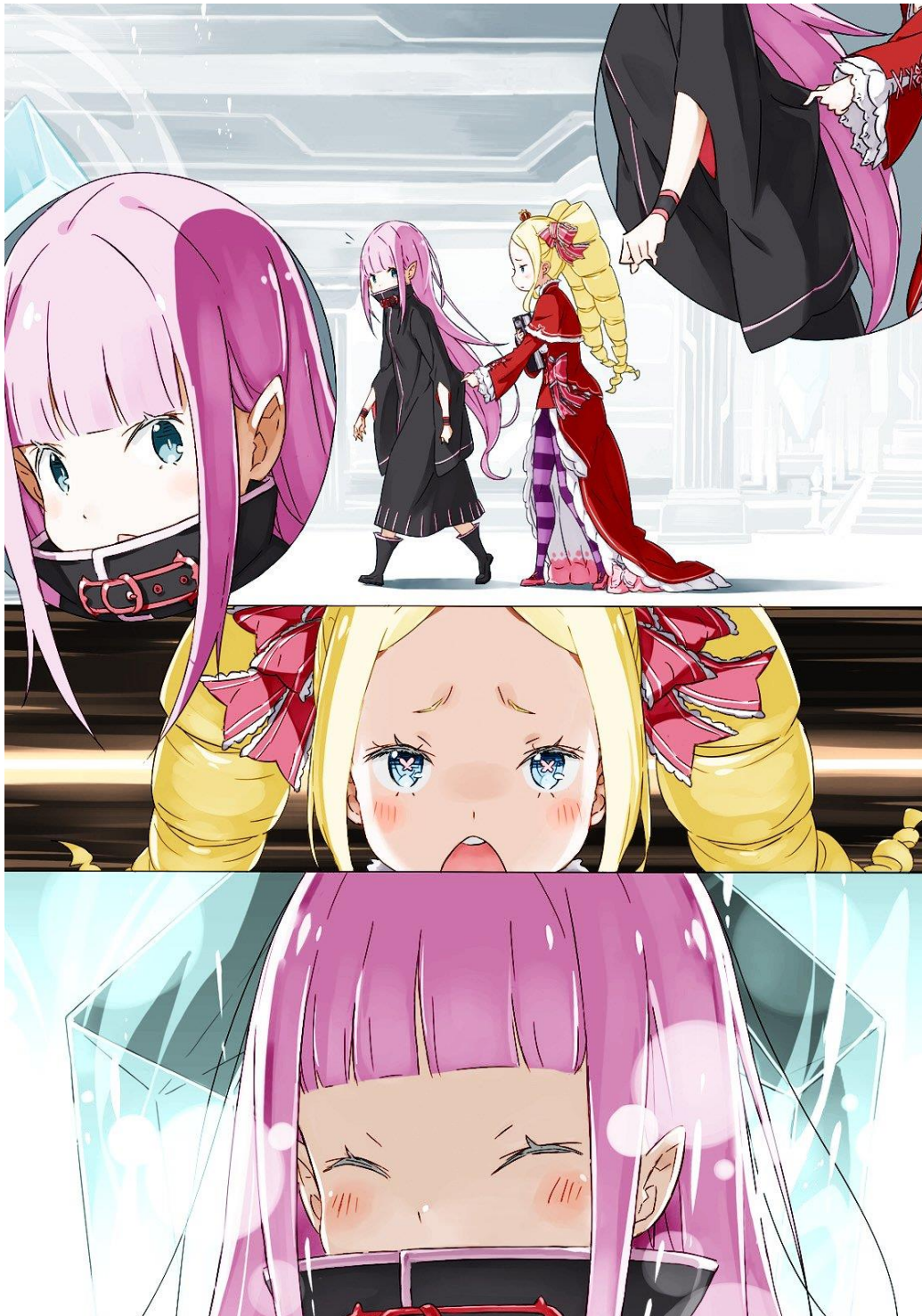


Illustration from Volume 14, coloring by DdukaE ([source](#))

Arc 4 Chapter 104 - Theta Part 2

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 14, Chapter 1 “—Journey of Memories”, Part 10

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

Theta: “And that’s all the pieces of the past I saw in the Tomb.”

Ending her story there, Theta brought the already cold tea to her lips and took a sip.

Sitting on the bed, meekly listening to her tale, Subaru held his breath as Theta announced that it was over. Then, with a long, deep sigh, he expelled everything that had pent up inside him.

He strained his lungs to their limit, spewing out all the air and indescribable emotions in his chest—and raised his head.

Subaru: “So that’s... the actual foundation of the Sanctuary, and Ryuzu Meyer’s memories.”

Theta: “I’m sure you already know what happened to Ryuzu after she was swallowed by the crystal. She’s still preserved exactly as she was back then, deep in the Witch-sama’s research facility.”

Subaru: “But, this doesn’t match what I know about the crystal’s purpose at all. Echidna never mentioned that the Ryuzu Meyer in the crystal had anything to do with the Sanctuary’s barrier, but said that it was for something else...”

According to Echidna in the Citadel of Dreams, Ryuzu Meyer was sealed in the crystal for Echidna’s experiments towards attaining immortality.

By sealing Ryuzu in the crystal, cloning her, and then filling the clones with Echidna’s own memories, she would’ve been able to achieve a kind of pseudo-immortality. But either Echidna’s death or some kind of technical error meant the experiment failed to bear fruit, while, over time, the mechanism continued to automatically create more and more Ryuzu replicants.

Theta's story had mentioned nothing about this pursuit of immortality.

Instead, what Subaru heard were multiple pieces of information which he simply could not let slide.

Subaru: "Then the real reason Echidna created the Sanctuary... that guy they were trying to keep out... who is he?"

Ryuzu: "..."

Subaru: "In the story, Roswaal called him Tristitia, but I've never seen or heard anything about this guy before. I didn't even know he existed until now. This whole time, I believed the person chasing Echidna was the Witch of Envy."

The Witch of Envy, who destroyed the six Witches of Sin.

Subaru had been convinced that the being he'd met in the dream was the one who cornered Echidna. But the character in the story turned out to be someone else entirely, someone Subaru had not heard even the vaguest mention of until now. His confusion was only natural.

However, the fact that he was called Tristitia did give Subaru some ideas, as much as he wished that they weren't true.

Subaru: "The Seven Deadly Sins are Pride, Envy, Wrath, Sloth, Greed, Gluttony, and Lust... But I heard it used to be different, and there were a few sins that got absorbed."

The Seven Deadly Sins was a term that made the heart of those of someone of Subaru's ilk flutter. And so, Subaru had naturally dabbled in some of this trivia, and after mobilizing his memories, he found what he was looking for.

Subaru: "If I remember correctly... Tristitia and Vainglory used to be counted among the Deadly Sins."

Before they were excluded from the other seven, Tristitia and Vainglory were once considered Deadly Sins. And if Tristitia existed, then it wouldn't be strange for Vainglory to exist as well. If other Sins aside from the widely known Witches existed...

Theta: "It'd help me a lot if you could figure out on your own why I couldn't talk about some of these memories freely."

Subaru: “Why you couldn’t...?”

Subaru furrowed his brows as a wily grin unbefitting of Theta’s appearance rose onto her face.

Theta: “It was just like you said, Su-bo. Outside of these memories, I haven’t heard a lick about anyone called Tristitia, either. Anyone else you ask would give you the same answer. Though the world may have forgotten the names of the Witches of Sin, their existence is still told in legends. But the fact that no one knows that a being with such immense power even existed... is simply terrifying.”

Subaru: “———”

Theta’s downcast gaze spoke volumes of her apprehension.

Indeed, something was strange about all this. The Witch of Envy had been passed down through the generations as a synonym of horror and hate. Although the memories of the other Witches had been reduced to nothing but beings who were consumed by the Witch of Envy, their existence still remained in history.

Yet, not even a single shadow of Tristitia’s existence remained. Was it only a coincidence that the topic never came up around Subaru or Theta?

—Was it really possible that Subaru, who had attended the Witches’ tea party and met all those Witches, had not picked up even a whiff of this person’s existence?

Subaru: “—That first-generation Roswaal... did he die? If he did, then what’s with his descendant, the current Roswaal? Is he from a different branch of the family?”

Theta: “He did not die in battle. That’s what I heard, at least. From just the memories I saw, he must’ve been on the verge of death, but somehow managed to hang onto life. Although, I assume he would not have recovered to live a normal life... After what happened, this first-generation Roswaal, who should have gone on to reach the pinnacle of the magical arts, instead delved deeper and deeper into more sinister magic.”

Surely, Theta must’ve done everything she could in order to learn the truth. She alone would have had the most reason to want to verify whether those memories about Tristitia were genuine.

But, judging from the vagueness of her answer, it would seem that she did not succeed in her efforts.

Subaru: “If the original purpose of the Sanctuary was to keep Tristitia away from Echidna, and Ryuzu Meyer assented to Echidna’s plan and sacrificed herself to protect the Sanctuary... Then the crystal’s function to create replicants was something that came later...?”

Theta: “The ability to generate replicants is unnecessary for a system only meant to create a barrier. Most likely, you are right. The question is, what would be the motive for installing an additional function for generating clones afterwards?”

Subaru: “If Echidna was the one behind it... then the motive would be immortality. But if it was... then I have no idea what she was thinking when she came up with that idea.”

What must Echidna have felt when she saw Ryuzu Meyer sleeping in the crystal?

Echidna knew about Tristitia. Based on Theta’s memories, that much was certain. And yet, if she did, then there was something terribly unnatural about her behavior during her conversations with Subaru.

—Just what could be the answer to this newborn, isolated awryness?

Subaru: “Am I seriously still missing pieces...?”

Gritting his teeth, Subaru vexed over the missing piece keeping him from seeing the picture.

Finally, he scratched his head, deciding to postpone answering this question for now. And, the last part of Ryuzu’s story that Subaru could not let slide was,

Subaru: “—Beatrice lost her friend in the end.”

Theta: “...She did.”

Ryuzu Meyer was bashful and timid. Beatrice proud and stubborn.

Chances are, Ryuzu Meyer and Beatrice never even recognized their friendship until their very, very last moment together.

When Ryuzu Meyer melted into that crystal, just how much did that final, curse-like show of love wound Beatrice's heart?

Was it because of this parting that Beatrice rejected everyone for all of four-hundred years?

Subaru: "She lost someone in a painful way, and she's too afraid to hope again... It's not like I can't understand that feeling."

He could still remember Beatrice as she rejected his hand and begged him to let her die.

Was her reluctance to place hope in others the result of her four-hundred years of loneliness, of the memory of her parting with Ryuzu that first incited this isolation, and of the deep, cutting wound it had left?

Subaru felt like he could finally understand why she had become so reliant on Echidna's instruction to wait for that person, and just how much the passage of time had whittled down her heart.

The wound in Beatrice's heart from the loss of her only friend had remained an unhealable scar. If she could finally meet that person and fulfill Echidna's instruction, then perhaps her heart could be healed. But the absurd passage of time had caused the wound to fester and swell to a point it could burst.

And so, that girl felt like she was nearing her limit.

Subaru: "...Ryuzu-san, have any of you ever met Beatrice?"

Theta: "No, never. By the time the first of us were born, Beatrice-sama had already stopped coming to the Sanctuary, and she never visited since. None of the other replicants know about these memories, so I think it's best that we don't meet her."

Subaru: "-----"

Ultimately, Subaru agreed with Theta.

The real Ryuzu Meyer was sleeping inside the crystal. Although Theta looked exactly the same as the Ryuzu Meyer back then, she had no genuine memories of her time together with Beatrice. If Beatrice met Theta and the other replicants now, her wound would only widen and bring her nothing but anguish. But—

Subaru: "She absolutely needs to meet you guys."

This is necessary to get the girl, present at the moment of Sanctuary's creation, and inheritor of Ryuzu Meyer's wish, to start walking again.

Subaru: "So can I take that as all the reasons you went into hiding and tried to conceal the past?"

Theta: "...Yes. That is all. The Warlock they called Tristitia that seemed to exist nowhere outside of Ryuzu Meyer's memories... That thing existed, but the truth remains nowhere. It's overwhelmingly odd."

Subaru: "I agree. There must be something more to this, and to Echidna's attitude as well."

Theta: "And actually... there is one more thing."

Subaru furrowed his brows as Ryuzu interrupted, lowering her gaze. She kept her eyes off Subaru as she continued,

Theta: "If this Sanctuary was created by Ryuzu Meyer... by the wish of our progenitor... how could we break this barrier erected using her life as a sacrifice? I lack the courage to do it."

Subaru: "-----"

Theta: "The times have changed. We are separated by centuries from Ryuzu Meyer's era. The treatment of half-bloods, the persecution and ostracism experienced by the generation who lived through the Witch of Envy's reign of terror, must have improved somewhat by now... I understand why people would urge for this place to be liberated so they could set their sights to the outside world..."

Subaru: "...Of course, I can't say that everything is perfect. Discrimination is still around everywhere. And I'm sure you'll face a lot of unpleasantness if you leave. But..."

Subaru's thoughts turned to the scene in the Royal Palace. To Emilia, in the Royal Selection Hall, who put her thoughts and ideals into words while she withstood the malevolence directed at her in turn.

Surely, a world where Emilia's ideals are achieved would be a world where the people of the Sanctuary would be safe, and where Ryuzu Meyer's wish would be fulfilled.

Subaru: “When Emilia’s dream is realized, this ended Sanctuary will be born anew. Because once all her dreams come true... everyone in this world would be able to call it their Sanctuary.”

Theta: “———”

No doubt, Emilia would endeavor to make it happen. And though he couldn’t say for sure, at least half of the other Royal Selection candidates must also strive for such a world.

After all, no person’s value should be determined by their race. One day, this idea which comes so naturally to Subaru would certainly be accepted far and wide.

Theta: “It’s only a dream. But it certainly is pleasant to the ears.”

Subaru: “Yeah. So, does that mean I’ve got your heart fluttering?”

Theta: “Flirting with an old hag like myself, what a sinful man you are, Su-bo.”

Holding back the chuckles in the back of her throat, Theta’s youthful features instantly took on an elderly hue. Then, watching Subaru’s tongue-in-cheek shrug, Theta’s expression brightened once more,

Theta: “Seeing how much I want to be duped by those pleasant words, I guess I’m really getting old.”

Subaru: “Or maybe it’s just the little girl inside you falling for my dangerous charms.”

Theta: “Pfft.”

Subaru: “That’s the first time I got scoffed off by a Ryuzu-san, you know!”

Flinging his hands into the air and then down again, Subaru slumped in defeat. Theta only shook her head at Subaru’s strange behavior and set her empty cup on the table. Then, looking up at the crisscrossed silver shields on the wall,

Theta: “A time when the world outside this Sanctuary—— also becomes a Sanctuary, huh.”

Subaru: “That time will come. And when it does, it’ll be a shame if you are still holed up in here. There’s nothing more fun than flipping the middle finger at all these assholes telling you to give up, after all.”

True worth comes from overcoming something that no one else thought you could.

That's what all challenges and battles are.

Because the most magnificent struggle is one chasing after an impossible dream.

Theta: “—Alright, Su-bo. I'll go along with you and Emilia-sama's dreams.”

Subaru: “Theta-san...”

Theta: “I've already decided from the start. Were you to be the first one to reach me, I'd tell you the story and leave the decision to you. Now that you've heard the story, I see you still want to liberate the Sanctuary... and you even managed to laugh off my concerns.”

Subaru: “I don't think I can muster enough bravado to actually laugh it off though...”

Theta: “Even so, that's fine. Mm, that's fine.”

As if letting go of some heavy burden, Theta nodded several times to Subaru's answer.

From her reaction, Subaru could sense that she had finally reached out her hand from the prison of those memories which, she had no one to share with during all those years. Whether or not to take that hand and bring her to the outside world—that was the decision she had left to him.

Subaru: “So now, there's no longer any Ryuzu-sans opposed to liberating the Sanctuary, right?”

Theta: “Right... But this won't mean anything until the Sanctuary's barrier is released. It is still up to Emilia-sama to pass the Trials, that much hasn't changed.”

Just when Subaru gave himself a relieved pat on the chest for eliminating one outstanding issue, Theta pulled him back to reality. Hearing this, Subaru's relaxed cheeks tensed once more.

It was certainly a relief that he found Theta. But the fact that many more problems remain unresolved hadn't changed.

He managed to find Theta before Garfiel could. But Emilia is still missing, even now.

Theta: “You are confident in Emilia-sama's chances of overcoming the Trial, then?”

Subaru: “I’ve tried all sorts of things to encourage her... rather, hoped would encourage her. But the medicine might’ve been too strong and now I’m having a bit of trouble tracking her down. We are hoping for a quick solution.”

Theta: “Y—you don’t know where she is!? Y—you sure this is going to work!? After everything I’ve told you about my past just now, you realize if Emilia bungles this, all of my resolve is going to waste!?”

Subaru: “You are totally right to be worried so I can’t exactly complain, but... Well, after hearing your story, I thought of something.”

Ryuzu Meyer sacrificed her life in order to protect the Sanctuary. The way she placed others before herself to the very, very end was a lot like that girl who always prioritized others to her own detriment. Even if her heart was being withered by endless anguish and mounting hardships, Subaru would not believe for a second that that girl would lose sight of her responsibility and of the hopes placed in her.

Subaru: “I think I might know where she is.”

Theta: “———”

Subaru: “And even if that’s not it, we’ll turn this little Sanctuary upside down to find her. Even now, my buddy must be half in tears looking all over the place. And if that still isn’t enough to find her, then that just leaves the one place we couldn’t look.”

Seeing Subaru’s conviction, the slightly panicked Theta relinquished a long sigh. Without asking for further confirmation, she only continued with “In that case...”,

Theta: “If you are saying you will be able to find Emilia and have her pass the Trials... then Gar-bo would be the last hurdle.”

Subaru: “Just from the fragments I heard from Sigma-san, his past was about his parting with his mother. You were also in the Tomb at the time, do you know anything about that?”

Theta: “It’s only to be expected... That child is extremely averse to talking about his family. Maybe part of it is because he’s worried how I’d feel... And he’s had a hard time dealing with what happened with Frederica.”

Frederica and Garfiel's parting became final when he swiped away her hand as she left for the outside world.

As for why Garfiel stayed behind in the Sanctuary, perhaps it was to protect the residents who couldn't leave, unlike his quarter-blood sister and himself, from the potential threats that might endanger them.

—And then, consistent with Echidna's hint about Garfiel's fear of the outside world, there was,

Subaru: "The trauma of his parting with his mother, huh. He must hate the outside world. I was really kinda hoping he'd be able to help me out with a few things outside, though."

Theta: "Su-bo and Gar-bo fighting side-by-side... hm. Mm, that does sound nice."

When she thinks of Garfiel, Theta's smiling visage would lose all its youthful impression, but simply overflow with maternal compassion for her grandson.

Perhaps, for the four of them playing the role of Ryuzu, even if it resided within each of them separately, the emotion of familial love for Garfiel certainly existed. And surely, Garfiel felt the same towards them.

Subaru: "...Well, first I'll need to find Emilia."

He must continue to prepare for the worst case regarding Garfiel.

Now that he had sealed the Contract with Roswaal— with this being one of the victory conditions of the bet, his final confrontation with Garfiel was inevitable.

And the same went for Emilia breaking through the Trials, which Roswaal had deemed impossible, but aside from providing encouragements, Subaru would have to let her overcome that on her own. When she lost her bond with Puck, Emilia had lost the supporting beam of her heart. And in exchange, the lid on her inadmissible memories preventing her from truly facing the First Trial was now gone.

Or at least it should be, provided everything was going according to Puck's plan. Once she accepts this fact and faces the Trial once more, she should be presented with a different scene than what she has been seeing thus far.

Would Emilia still be able to give the same answer when that happens?

—Even though Natsuki Subaru could not be there with her in that moment, he had made it his duty to do everything in his power to make sure she does when the time comes.

Subaru: “I know you probably want to give Garfiel a hug right now, but could you stay here for a bit, Theta-san? Since that guy doesn’t want to come close to this place, we can keep him distracted for a little longer.”

Theta: “And while Gar-bo’s attention is elsewhere, you’ll be up to some clever mischief, I assume?”

Subaru: “Why does everyone wanna refer to what I’m doing as «mischief» and «nefarious plotting»? Do you guys really see me as that kind of conniving scoundrel?”

Seeing Subaru tilt his head, Theta didn’t give an answer.

Slightly irritated by her silence, Subaru sighed and scratched his head.

Subaru: “So... am I still right to think that today’s the decisive day and tomorrow’s an extra...? If Emilia’s where I think she is, all that’s left to deal with is Garfiel and Roswaal.”

Those two would be the final bottlenecks to achieving the Sanctuary’s victory conditions.

He and Otto had carefully planned to keep those two out of the way. But now, everything will depend on their timing, preparations, and how well they’ve done their job. Their chances increase in proportion to the perfection of their timing and length of their prep time— That much was obvious.

Subaru: “Whether we are laughing or crying, we have to settle everything by the day after tomorrow. We can’t mess up at the critical moment... Right, Theta-san?”

Theta: “Even if you look at me for agreement, what do you want me to say? —When a man’s resolve is all over his face, all that’s left is to go for it. I’ll be waiting with great expectations.”

Without sharing in Subaru’s enthusiasm, Theta affirmed his intentions all the same.

The awkward smile on her face might very well have been something which often adorned Ryuzu Meyer’s face. Surely, that expression was one Beatrice knew well.

He would persuade Garfiel, support Emilia, and fetch Beatrice.

There was still much to be done, and many more obstacles to stand in his way. Storm clouds were gathering overhead, with no easy answer to clear them all away.

Nevertheless, Subaru's heart was strangely optimistic.

That's because the things he needed to do were the same as the things he wanted to do.

No matter how difficult it would be to surmount the towering obstacles before his eyes, it was infinitely better than the time he'd spent utterly lost as to what to do. At last, Subaru was ready to reach out towards that intangible thing named fate.

He pulled on his own cheeks, letting go with a peal as he pumped himself up. Giving the wide-eyed Theta a smile and a little wave, Subaru headed for the building's exit.

Then, with his hand on the door, he glanced back as if suddenly remembering something, and,

Subaru: "Actually, Ryuzu Meyer talked in a way that's pretty normal for her age, so how come the replica Ryuzu-sans all talk like grannies? Is that like an acquired trait?"

Theta: "What are you talking about? —Do I not talk in a way that's completely normal for my age?"

With an indignant snort, Theta placed her hands on her hips and puffed out her flat chest.

But calling that a gesture suited for her age would surely be impossible.

Picturing the other girl in a dress who had passed the ages without the slightest growth in her body, Subaru left the building, bathed in the wind.

Holding onto that somewhat uplifting feeling, he turned to his final challenge.

—Natsuki Subaru's fight to end the Sanctuary, and to birth it anew, had begun.

Arc 4 Chapter 105 - The Travelling Merchant's Trap

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 13, Chapter 4 “Lies, Liars, and Con Artists”, Part 6

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#)

Garfiel: “———”

Crumpling his nose, an abrupt sense of awryness compelled Garfiel to stop.

His wind-like figure carried by ground-breaking strides broke to a sudden halt. Jamming his right foot into the soft earth, sweeping up clouds of dust, Garfiel stooped his posture low, turning his head to and fro, sniffing and scrutinizing the scents in the air.

He was in the forest surrounding the Sanctuary, searching for the missing Ryuzu within the barrier's bounds. He'd already checked all the places he thought she could be and had gone back and forth more times than he could count in search of her small, familiar figure.

All the while, his heart raced in panic from an ominous sense of foreboding.

He could sense that things weren't going his way. Outsiders were throwing their weight around in the Sanctuary, and even Ryuzu was acting strangely— She wasn't even consulting him before making decisions anymore.

Garfiel: “Damn it... The hell's goin' on.”

Clawing at his short blond hair, Garfiel traced his finger over the white scar on his forehead.

Garfiel had a habit to touch this scar whenever he was confused, lost, or when his heart had lost its calm, as a reminder to compose himself. Tracing his finger over the scar, he'd remember the time when he was at his most foolish, when he received this life-long wound— and immediately regain his composure.

Most people who knew Garfiel would judge his personality to be crude and hasty. They would've gotten this impression from Garfiel's outlandish conduct and appearance, but actually, that would be a mistake.

In reality, Garfiel Tinsel was surprisingly coolheaded and self-assured, constantly urging himself to think. Garfiel made this a matter of discipline— because he was keenly aware that brute strength alone isn't enough to get what he wants.

What does he need to know and do to see his wish fulfilled? It was to answer this question that Garfiel single-mindedly cultivated his unshakable code. But—

Garfiel: "Still... everyone's goin' around doin' whatever th'fuck they like... Tch."

In frustration and anguish, Garfiel bared his sharp canine teeth, grunting.

Indeed, the situation was slipping further and further out of his grip. But since unshakable codes required unshakable conviction, Garfiel was terrible when it came to flexible thinking.

All along, Garfiel had only one answer, and one stance, towards the Sanctuary's liberation. Regardless of the countless branching routes along the way, it was the one point which he must never concede. And so, he had taken every possible care to think everything through to the end.

But Ryuzu's unilateral decisions and the outsiders' underhanded tactics never figured into his considerations.

Sadly, although Garfiel never stopped thinking, he had neither experience nor any exceptional intellect to draw on. All he had was desperate tenacity, and nothing more.

Garfiel: "———Hk."

Taking a sharp sniff, Garfiel's golden pupils narrowed into slits.

Catching the scent, the hair on his back stood on end as he swiftly bent his knees, leapt— and resumed his prowling. Stepping on tree branches and using them to launch himself ever faster and higher, he soared unbound through the foliage, chasing that scent.

Garfiel: "All clumped together... The hell are they planning, hah!?"

Clicking his fangs, he put his agitation to voice as he roared. Expelling a growl like that of a feline beast, Garfiel's eyes blazed with rage.

What his nose had caught was the stench of an exceedingly large assembly of many living beings. The stench of sweat, the stench of trodden grass and soil, the stench of tension seeping out of anxious human bodies, the stench, the stench, the stench—

Garfiel: “———!!”

It was nothing less than the stench of a mass of humans on the move. More than ten, closer to fifty. There was only one group in the Sanctuary capable of fielding such numbers at this time.

—The refugees from the village near Roswaal's mansion.

The same ingrates who had fled here seeking refuge. What are they planning, mobilizing at a time like this? Is this how they repay the people who took them in?

Garfiel: “That son of’a bitch... Told him not to fuck with me...!”

That contemptible youth with short black hair appeared in Garfiel mind.

That boy, whose sharp eyes stood in stark contrast to his conspicuous frivolousness. And yet his gaze was also occasionally lucid and piercing, as if he could see right through Garfiel.

That gaze, which always seemed to be looking towards some indeterminable place, reminded Garfiel of another man he despised. And Garfiel loathed him because of it.

No doubt, this youth whom he had never liked was behind all this.

The refugees were moving at his instigation, that much was clear. For some inexplicable reason, they placed their overwhelming trust in this youth.

He had no strength, no apparent special powers, and his only proficiency seemed to be his ability to prattle. As far as Garfiel was concerned, he was the most loathsome, weak, foolish, and selfish creature in the world.

But now, Garfiel couldn't help but think that he should have dealt with him sooner. There had been plenty of chances, that boy had left himself wide open, and yet his eerie, unnerving resolve in the face of overwhelming odds caused Garfiel to stay his hand.

The reward for his hesitation was the current predicament.

And above all, the forces threatening the stability of the Sanctuary were now taking advantage of the fact that he'd lost sight of Ryuzu, his only family, to do whatever they pleased. No matter what, he will not allow a single refugee to leave the Sanctuary.

A different stance would have been taken if this were to happen a couple of days ago, but the situation had changed by now.

Garfiel: "...Does that bastard know 'bout Granny?"

In the place Garfiel called the Experimental Grounds and Ryuzu called the progenitor's room, was a crystal in which a girl named Ryuzu Meyer was sleeping.

Honestly, Garfiel had very little interest in that crystal. Although the girl sleeping there looks exactly like his only family, if what laid inside her was different, then she was someone else entirely. If any entity that looked like Ryuzu should be considered Ryuzu, then Garfiel already had over twenty of them at hand.

It would be impossible for Garfiel to harbor the same love and attachment towards the girl in the crystal, and he had no intention to try.

Garfiel held an absolute ability to command the replicants sharing his grandmother's face. Nevertheless, his temperament dictated he would do everything to avoid using it. Garfiel didn't enjoy ordering others around and seeing someone obeying his every command would give him an indescribable sense of irritation.

That was all he felt about the girl inside the crystal. He held no other sentiment towards her beyond that. Although Garfiel liked to think of himself as broad-minded, being broad-hearted was a different matter.

He never had much to give. He was just two arms, two legs, and a body.

There was only so much he could offer, and it was important to choose whom he offered it to. And so, Garfiel only cared for the people he loved.

Garfiel: "So... If y'think I'm gonna go gentle on ya, y'couldn't be more mistaken, y'naive fucks."

Kicking hard into the trunk of a tree, Garfiel leapt high above the forest. He hugged his knees as he somersaulted through the air before touching down and sending up a torrent of fallen leaves in his wake. The earth caved beneath his feet, and the screeching brays of ground dragons filled the gaps between the trees. The impact of his landing spread over the earth, as Garfiel slowly straightened his back.

This time, Garfiel crumpled his nose not to trace a scent, but to display his fury. Clicking his neck and gritting his razor fangs, he glared straight ahead with eyes alight with wrath. Standing before Garfiel were two carriages, arranged in a line.

The dragons pulling the carriages are shocked by Garfiel and his murderous presence, going into a state of extreme agitation as the coachman frantically calls out to calm them. Said coachman was a familiar face to Garfiel.

Garfiel: "Just when I was wonderin' who it is, if it ain't th'noisy bro. Hah! Should've guessed. If that bastard's dupin' anyone into this, it'd be you."

Otto: "That statement is awfully... Oh, never mind, I know all too well what people think of me..."

Garfiel stuck his hands into his trousers' pockets, while the driver, a troubled-looking youth with longish grey hair, Otto, gave him a wry smile. Skillfully controlling the reins, once he had managed to calm the agitated dragons, Otto let out a small sigh.

Garfiel: "Y'act like it's no big deal, but ground dragon usually pack their bags 'n run off when I'm serious 'bout threatenin' 'em."

Otto: "I had to persuade them pretty hard to make sure that didn't happen, you know. And besides, I've informed them beforehand that you'd be coming."

Garfiel: "Hah—?"

Unable to believe what he'd just heard, Garfiel's ears twitched at Otto's statement. His fingers unconsciously reached for his forehead as he stepped forward, intending to ask Otto what he was trying to say.

Garfiel: "What's that supposed t'mean? You thought y'could slip outta here thanks t'the chaos and then got yerself caught when I found ya. Ain't that what happened here?"

Otto: "Yeah, you are exactly right. Taking advantage of chaotic situations is bread and butter for us merchants. But just when I'd been promised a handsome reward and was about to succeed without incident..."

Garfiel: "..."

Otto buried his face in his hands, his schemes ruined. But, sensing a certain calmness in Otto's gestures and words, Garfiel's confusion only deepened.

This isn't the attitude of someone whose plans had just been foiled. In fact, doesn't his expression look just like Roswaal's when everything was playing right into his hands?

Garfiel: "That attitude and that fuckin' expression... Y'look just like the fuckin' asshole I hate th'most in this world."

Otto: "That's yet another horrible appraisal... But, just for reference's sake, mind if I ask which one you are referring to? I really want to be improving our relationship from now on."

Garfiel: "Hah! Me 'n you? Don't make me laugh, moron— The asshole I hate th'most in this world is loungin' in th'nicest room in th'Sanctuary, bein' waited on by a professional this very fuckin' moment."

Otto: "I see, I see... Must be tough, when the one you have your heart set on is falling head over heels for your love rival. I do sympathize with your plight."

Garfiel: "Y'want me t'force yer fuckin' mouth shut? Oy!?"

Garfiel smacked his tongue in annoyance as Otto mocked his feelings for Ram.

Indeed, Garfiel could have settled this with force if such was his wish. This escape attempt had already failed the moment Garfiel found out about it.

They were not going anywhere. But as long as they didn't try to force their way through, Garfiel saw no need for any unnecessary violence.

His first order of business should be settling this matter quickly and returning to the Sanctuary.

His priority was to preserve the Sanctuary, and this was nothing but a minor distraction.

Garfiel: "Anyway, now yer escape plan has failed. If that son of'a bitch is here, tell him t'come out. He better start apologizin' for pullin' this shit, or there's gonna be pain."

Garfiel needed somewhere to vent his pent-up frustration. And besides, Garfiel needed to know just what that youth, what Natsuki Subaru was thinking, pulling a stunt like this.

He'd boasted that he would break through the Trials and liberate the Sanctuary only a couple of days ago. Even considering the possibility he had lost heart, it had happened excessively quickly. Said more frankly, it was an excessive lack of willpower. Garfiel would take those screwy ideas of his, slap them into better order, and—

Otto: "Ehh, unfortunately, I'm afraid I won't be able to meet that request."

Garfiel: "Ahhhh?"

Otto: "Haven't you noticed? You said it yourself, I'm wearing the face of the man you hate the most in this world. Then surely, you don't expect me to do something that hated man wouldn't do?"

Garfiel: "——"

Ambiguous and roundabout, Garfiel couldn't understand what Otto was insinuating.

But Garfiel could tell that those were not statements he could just let slide. And above all, the fact that he was wearing the same face as that man he despised, Roswaal's face, meant that everything was going to plan.

Garfiel: "...Th'fuck are you plottin', oy."

Otto: "Oh right. Speaking of that face you and I both know, I guess you can call it the «I'm totally plotting something» face?"

Otto rubbed his nose as he said this, looking like he had just done something mischievous. Garfiel narrowed his eyes, and only now noticed the strangeness of this scene. There were two carriages, Otto, and two ground dragons before him— But there was no driver on the driver's platform in the rear carriage.

Rather, the full extent of the abnormality was far greater than that.

Garfiel: "How come... when th'dragon freaked and jolted the carriages... none of the bastards inside showed their fuckin' faces?"

Otto: "Hmm, I wonder why that would be?"

Otto shrugged, playing dumb, while doing nothing to stop the pale-faced Garfiel from approaching the carriages. Garfiel swiftly hopped onto the back of the carriage and wrenched open the flap to the passenger deck.

And, when he saw what was inside, Garfiel made a deafening clench of his teeth.

Otto: "—There's no one there, you know?"

Garfiel: "No shit... Guh. Th'fuck is going on! I smelled th'stENCH of a whole fuckin' crowd of'em movin' with the carriage...!"

Sending spit flying as he stepped into the passenger deck, Garfiel's sentence abruptly trailed off halfway.

At his feet, strewn all over the passer deck, were piles of clothing. Countless articles— men's, women's, adults' and children's, all dumped together. Meanwhile, faced with this sight, Garfiel's cheeks contorted as he realized that his nose had been deceived by this remarkably simple trick.

Garfiel: "Kh... It's a fuckin' trick...!"

Otto: "I told the other carriages to wait a bit before setting out, and they should all be leaving the Sanctuary by different routes right about now. Not even your legs will be able to catch them in time."

Garfiel: "Different routes? Th'fuck you talkin' about. There ain't another easy way outta here except this fuckin' path! They'll get lost on the way like sittin' ducks waitin' for me t'fetch'em. And I can cross through th'barrier, if y'didn't know."

Otto: "You are right, I don't know a whole lot about you. But..."

Jumping off the carriage and landing directly in front of Otto, Garfiel lunged a step forward upon hearing Otto's reply as agitation surged in his chest.

Otto: "...I doubt you know much about me, either."

Garfiel: "-----"

Otto: "You are the kind of guy who doesn't give a damn about someone like me. And you have nothing but contempt for people like Natsuki-san and myself, who do nothing but talk. And so, you paid no attention to what I was doing, or even what I'm doing right now."

Garfiel: "Th'fuck are you sayin'?"

Otto: "What I'm trying to say is, I wasn't just wandering around the forest over the past few days and spending my nights in the stables with the ground dragons for no reason at all. I was uncovering escape routes that don't rely on this road and teaching it to them!"

Otto flung up both his arms and announced this with a triumphant expression.

Hearing this, Garfiel's jaw dropped as his sharp eyes widened.

Teaching? Teaching it to who? The carriage drivers? That doesn't connect with what he was saying just now. Unless, did he mean he was in the stables talking to the ground dragons? If that was the case, then,

Garfiel: "That bastard's duped ya pretty hard, huh..."

Otto: "Wha—!? I'm having a bit of trouble accepting that interpretation just now!"

Garfiel gives a sympathetic gaze as Otto kicks up a noisy fuss. This is his usual behavior, the kind of thing he's always doing when Garfiel spots him around Sanctuary.

But, seeing normal behavior in this context was, indeed, abnormal.

Garfiel: "Either way, yer headin' back now. I'll find th'others 'n drag 'em back as well."

Otto: "They would've dispersed in different directions by now, so you won't catch them. But if you still want to go after them, I was told to tell you this— «The refugees know nothing about the truth of Sanctuary, nor about Ryuzu-san. You lose nothing by letting them go». So, what do you say?"

Garfiel: "He's planned this from th'start...?"

The message almost certainly came from Subaru. He had perfectly grasped the reason why Garfiel didn't want anyone to leave. The feeling of being more and more entangled in another person's plots does ignite Garfiel's irritation, but if what Otto said was true, he has lost his reason to go chasing after the evacuees.

Garfiel: "But y'expect me t'just believe that...?"

Otto: "Suspicious one, aren't you? But I'll just say this. None of us, Natsuki-san included, wants to worsen our relations with the people of the Sanctuary. In fact, we'd like to see the Sanctuary liberated under the most amicable conditions... and right now, it looks like you are the one getting in the way of that."

Garfiel: "...I've no interest in makin' friends or gettin' in th'way of it. 'Slong as y'stay inside."

Otto: "Why get so caught up on the details?"

Garfiel: "That's not fuckin' negotiable."

Otto showed an expression of astonishment while Garfiel exhaled a heavy sigh.

Although he voiced his suspicions, Garfiel judged that it was probably the truth. The fact that Subaru left this message meant he knew Garfiel's reasons for wanting to keep everyone inside— And so, naturally, it would've made sense for Subaru to keep whatever secrets he'd uncovered hidden from the refugees.

Garfiel: "But just... Why go t'the effort of pulling all these stunts to get 'em out of th'Sanctuary? What makes him think they're gonna get hurt if they stay here? What happened t'trustin' the people y'wanna be friends with?"

Otto: "In that case, I can think of a name that'd be pretty high on the list. But I asked him as well, and Natsuki-san said it's insurance. And... for buying time as well."

Garfiel: “———”

The moment Garfiel heard the words “buying time”, his expression stiffened. Why on earth would they need to be “buying time”? Garfiel wet his lips with his tongue, and,

Garfiel: “What th’hell are you tryin’ t’do...?”

Otto: “Just making sure that a boy and girl can have some private time together without getting bothered by nosy peepers, you know.”

With an exhausted yet accomplished expression, Otto slowly shook his head.

Garfiel was just about to object to this frivolous reply when he saw Otto’s expression and stopped. Because it was not the face of someone telling a lie.

That means he was speaking the truth. And the boy and the girl must be Subaru and Emilia.

Garfiel: “———”

A gut feeling immediately told him that those two must not be allowed to meet.

The bestial blood coursing through his veins instinctively knew this.

Garfiel’s face sprang up as he turned to the direction of the village. If he allows Subaru and Emilia to meet, something unthinkable is going to happen. The Sanctuary will be liberated, and——

Garfiel: “———”

There’s no way they can do it, Garfiel’s rationality told him. He himself had seen how Emilia was broken by the merciless Trial. And just yesterday she had lost the primary support of her heart.

How could that girl, crushed and beaten by her own nightmare, recover in the span of a day?

Yet Garfiel’s instinct screamed for him to rush over there and stop them.

In the Trial of the Past, even considering they were shown different pasts, all challengers are presented with their most unpleasant memories.

Garfiel was shown his when he foolishly stepped into the Tomb.

Just thinking back on it made all the blood drain from his body as an unbearable hollowness breached into his heart. From that point onwards, he had always told himself to be strong, so strong that he would never have to betray his decision. That was how deep the Trial had cut into his heart.

Garfiel: "Th'situation's changed. I'm goin' back to th'Sanctuary. I gotta find 'em and change their minds before they..."

Otto: "And you think I'm just going to let you go?"

Garfiel: "-----"

Just as Garfiel turned to head towards the village, Otto called out to stop him.

But Garfiel's response was fierce.

Otto: "—Ugh, kh."

Garfiel: "Shut up 'n take a nap. I ain't got time t'play with you."

Closing the distance with a single step, Garfiel drove his fist into Otto's stomach. Avoiding the ribs, Garfiel aimed straight for Otto's gut, sending him flying backwards, foaming at the mouth as he crashed to the ground.

Garfiel had gone easy on him. He had put in more than enough force to knock Otto unconscious, but in terms of payback for the trick he'd played on him, Garfiel was being more than merciful.

Clicking his tongue at the fallen Otto, Garfiel lightly dug his heels into the earth, and—

Otto: "—Whe... re do you think you're... going?"

Garfiel: "—!?"

—Just when he was about to launch into his sprint, Garfiel stopped.

Dumbstruck, he glanced back and saw that Otto was standing. He was holding his stomach, coughing and drooling, but conscious, nonetheless.

Garfiel: "Th'fuck? I wasn't tryin' t'kill ya, but that punch should'a knocked y'clean out, oy!"

Otto: "Is that right...? Then... I guess I'm... tougher than you thought. Yeah... looks like the daily workouts were worth it after all... A travelling merchant's body is their greatest capital, they say... It pays to stay healthy..."

Otto gave a painful chuckle while an ominous feeling compelled Garfiel to properly turn around.

One more blow and he'll definitely go down. No more going easy this time. He'll aim for the head instead. It'll probably leave a scar, but it'll knock him out for sure.

Garfiel: "This one's gonna hurt, so better clench yer teeth 'n..."

Otto: "You are still... going easy on me...? You know... that half-assed attitude is exactly why you are gonna lose!"

As Garfiel leaned forward preparing his next strike, Otto screamed back. Glaring at Garfiel with bloodshot eyes, Otto swung his arm with all the strength he could muster.

The next instant, a screen of leaves was flung up, covering Garfiel's vision, creating a momentary opening.

Garfiel: "What th—!?"

Startled by the sudden reversal, Garfiel's body froze still. And—

Otto: "Eat this—!!"

Alongside Otto's throat-tearing shriek, a burst of light pierced through the screen of dancing leaves—

—Swallowing Garfiel's body into a radiance of blinding red.

Arc 4 Chapter 106 - Otto Suwen

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 13, Chapter 4 “Lies, Liars, and Con Artists”, Part 8, and
Volume 13, Chapter 5 “Otto Suwen”, Parts 3

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken – [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#)

Grimacing at the blistering heat on his skin, Garfiel violently kicked at the fallen leaves around him.

Garfiel: “Th’guy’s got guts, I’ll give’em that.”

It was a growl of irritation, but also of honest praise.

“Your half-assed attitude is why you are going to lose”— That was what Otto told him. And he was absolutely right. Thinking Otto had no combat capabilities, Garfiel had completely underestimated him.

Garfiel: “Fire stones... The hell’s he tryin’ t’do’ with somethin’ as biteless as that?”

A momentary, vision-obscuring screen of flames.

With his annoyance still fresh on his mind, Garfiel thought back on that flash of searing heat. All smoke and mirrors, it stung, but its damage was no more than that of a sunburn. Yet, one thing was certain,

Garfiel: “If he’d used somethin’ more deadly I wouldn’t ‘ve gotten off this easy...”

In that fatal moment, his opponent made an unexpected choice.

What else to call it if not an act of mercy? The opponent he held back on and failed to knock unconscious turned around and taught him a lesson instead.

That was just way too wretched and stupid.

Garfiel: “Gotta be fuckin’ kiddin’ me...!”

What was even more infuriating was how his opponent completely ignored him while he was blinded by the flames and just straight-up ran away. By the time Garfiel thought to chase him, Otto was already nowhere to be found.

soft soil and fallen leaves. He certainly managed a skillful escape on what should've been unfamiliar terrain. Otto wasn't lying about scouting around the forest at night.

Nevertheless, if this turned into a genuine chase scene, there would be no way he could escape Garfiel. Every ten steps that Otto ran, Garfiel was able to cover in two. Such was the enormity of the physical difference between their bloodlines.

But Otto had this covered as well.

Garfiel: “—Gh! Th'hell!? This... Argh! Fuck, my nose ain't workin'!”

The moment Garfiel tried to sniff for Otto's scent, an intense, painful stench pierced his nostrils. Recoiling from the stench, Garfiel shook his head as his vision strobed from the penetrating pain.

And that was when he saw a clear glass bottle lying on the spot where Otto had been standing. He could immediately tell that the colorless liquid flowing from the uncapped bottle was the source of that pungent scent. But that was all his nose could tell him.

Garfiel: “Son of'a bitch...! Does'he think he can beat me just by cloggin' my nose?”

Baring his fangs, Garfiel flushed with rage at his dwindling options.

Just how many traps had Otto set against him? Every step of the way, these tricks had perfectly held him in check.

Garfiel: “———”

Touching the scar on his forehead, panting, Garfiel repeated his ritual to calm himself. He drew in a deep breath to settle his heart and lungs, wrestling back his senses from being consumed by rage. Thinking about it now, there is no way Otto could keep him subdued indefinitely.

So why would Otto risk himself in such a reckless battle?

Besides, Otto challenging Garfiel in the first place was a strange development. He said his goal was to buy time—to draw Garfiel's attention, while the refugees escaped the Sanctuary via other routes.

If what he said was true, then it'd be impossible for Garfiel to stop all the carriages now.

The thought of sending the Ryuzu clones to chase them had briefly crossed Garfiel's mind, but as he does not know any of the carriages' current locations, it would amount to a futile effort. The replicants lack knowledge and experience and could only carry out very crude commands. They didn't even know when to eat their meals unless instructed to, and if they were pushed beyond their limits, they would just curl up into little balls and give up on life.

Garfiel was too sick and tired of having to run around looking for them when that happens.

Garfiel: "And in th'end, th'only one I can rely on 's myself. Hah! Same as it's always been."

He was out of options, and his nose was disabled.

But Garfiel wasn't pessimistic. He still had his powerful body. And it still had more than enough strength left to carry him through the forest and achieve his goal. No matter what Otto's objectives may have been, he dared to stand against Garfiel. Surely, when he decided to oppose him, he must've been prepared to taste Garfiel's claws and fangs.

As far as Garfiel was concerned, Otto was no simple prey any longer. This was now a hunt that would require his efforts in full, and he would not stop until he had Otto completely at his mercy.

—By the time Garfiel thought this, he had already forgotten his original intent and didn't even realize that he was falling right into Otto's plans.

Garfiel: "Where'd y'get th'fuckin' gall. That bastard left y'instructions, didn't he... Th'hell did he say?"

Just before setting out into the forest in pursuit of Otto, Garfiel turned his head, looking to the carriages Otto left behind. The carriages were decoys pretending to be carrying fleeing refugees. Yet the two ground dragons drawing them were real, and they had been quietly sitting there like it was none of their business during the entirety of Otto and Garfiel's standoff.

Garfiel: “Y’think if y’just sit there I won’t hurt ya? Cheeky bastards. Yer lucky I don’t like t’kill unless I need to.”

Shaking his head, Garfiel passed by the dragons and reached for the passenger car once more.

Countless items of clothing had been heaped inside the car to mimic the scent of fleeing villagers. Last time, Garfiel left it as soon as he confirmed this, but there might’ve been something else he’d missed. Pushing apart the piles of clothes with his feet, Garfiel scanned his eyes over the seats and walls. Nothing really stood out, and after searching a little more, he was about to descend the carriage when,

Garfiel: “—Huh?”

He saw something sticking to the back of the carriage door as he turned.

A white piece of paper fluttering in the wind, as if placed there specifically to be visible from the inside.

—Feeling a sense of foreboding, Garfiel walked up to the fluttering note, tore it off, and opened it in his hands. And, written on it was “—If you are really this gullible, then it was totally worth the trouble”.

Reading the message, Garfiel’s vision flashed furious red.

The next instant— the seats of the carriage shot up as black lumps underneath exploded in that cramped space, expelling a violent gale in the form of a storm of winged insects, drowning Garfiel’s roars to nothing.

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—For the young Otto Suwen, the world was like hell’s cradle.

???: “———”

???: “xxxxxxxxx”

???: “※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※”

???: “* * * * * ! * ! *¹⁶⁰”

Day and night, without end, Otto’s ears were flooded with words that made no sense to him.

He’d sit on the floor in a daze, and the voices would come, sometimes like close-by whispers, sometimes like distant cries, sometimes like pleasant songs, and sometimes like shrieks of death, the world constantly reminded Otto of their connection.

No matter where he went in the world, the voices chased young Otto without end. Day after day without respite, the eternal echo of their discordant chorus, that useless infernal concerto, remained Otto’s constant companion.

—How could everyone live in such a noisy world like it was nothing?

In a hell where he couldn’t properly understand anyone around him, Otto asked himself that question.

His parents would hold him up and cast him words of affection, smiling. But no matter how much love was abound in those words, the dissonant clamor would consume them, never allowing them to reach Otto’s ears.

When his parents noticed that something was different about their son, they took him immediately to a doctor. He would not laugh, would not scream, and would not cry. This utter lack of emotional expression was because all external stimulus felt the same to Otto. And so, despite his worried parents, Otto spent his early childhood in emotionless indifference.

Perhaps it was fortunate the Suwens were a middle-class merchant family, wealthy enough to send their son to doctor. But no doctor could figure out what was wrong with Otto. Well, naturally. Since all Otto had in terms of symptoms was deafness from the excessive noise.

A brother two years his elder, and a brother two years his junior. Unlike Otto, his brothers grew up healthy, nourished by their parents’ love. Their parents’ attention to Otto gradually faded as the love initially portioned for three was eventually divided between two, and Otto grew distant from his parents’ warmth.

¹⁶⁰ That’s really how it is in the Web Novel.

Otto held no grudge or jealousy towards his brothers or parents. At the time, he felt no hate nor envy, nor any discernible emotion for that matter. Although Otto couldn't understand a thing they were saying, his brothers still interacted with him as patiently as they could. And besides, it was only natural that his parents would be emotionally exhausted.

If he were in his brothers' shoes back then, Otto wasn't sure that he would've been so kind to such a strange family member. For that, he was grateful.

While sounds could not reach him, written words still made communication possible. It was his older brother who first discovered this while reading a book out loud to Otto. Of course, learning to read and write proved extremely difficult. Otto could not register the sounds needed to understand those words, so it took him ten times longer than an ordinary child to memorize the sequences of letters.

Nevertheless, it did not bother him. And sadly, this was because Otto lacked the sensibility to be distressed by that fact, having no concept of what life was supposed to be like for normal children.

"Thank you, for everything"— He could still vividly remember the tears streaming down his parents' faces as they hugged him when he wrote these words on a piece of paper and showed it to them.

He didn't completely understand the concept of gratitude, but he figured it was something he ought to do. That was young Otto's decision, and when he wrote down these words out of that sense of obligation, a wave rose in his heart.

—That might've been the first time since birth that he'd cried so loudly. And indeed, it was like his second birth-wail.

???: "Ffaghatkgaoytajijijiji."

???: "Agategatagfatttetaadaertera."

???: "Miiimiiimuuumiiimeemiiimiii."

Not long after Otto's second birth-cry, he started discovering patterns within the once incomprehensible chorus of hell. And, little-by-little, Otto found that he was able to sort and selectively block out the myriad of noises assailing his eardrums.

It was around Otto's eighth birthday when he became capable of completely separating himself from the ambient noises at will. Otto was now practically a healthy child, and, like rain falling on an arid desert, he greedily soaked up everything he could.

Otto had already lost the chance to learn most of the things an eight-year-old would need to know, so although he had diligently poured his time into learning how to read and write, his comprehension level was still far behind other children his age. But, using his newfound concentration as his weapon, Otto closed that gap in no time.

From there, Otto Suwen's hidden potential bloomed. He was no longer falling behind his brothers. Or rather, his comprehension and intelligence surpassed even them. With his exceptional ability to learn, Otto soon distinguished himself among his peers—

—And spectacularly botched his interpersonal relationships, leaving him friendless.

Otto: "How does everyone live in this difficult world like it's nothing?"

Otto muttered, hugging his knees, his cheeks red and swollen courtesy of the girl he had a crush on.

At ten-years-old, Otto was diligently studying so he would not shame himself as a merchant's son. Most children of that era did not have access to education at such an early age. So Otto was certainly privileged to be able to spend his days alongside his peers this way.

The only problem was that Otto's emotional and mental age were both seven years behind other children his age.

Otto never had a chance to make the mistakes most children should have made, so, now he was able to, naturally, he erred everything he could. While he would've been forgiven had he done this when he was younger, as Otto was way past the age to be making such mistakes, everyone around him was baffled.

To make matters worse, Otto Suwen was a boy perfectly blessed with bad luck.

If you were to ask his parents, then Otto's misfortune began immediately after birth, when he nearly drowned during his first bath. And despite everyone's best efforts, he'd end up tumbling downstairs, hit by bird poop, drowning in puddles, and being generally beset by misfortune.

The reason he was not aware of this at the time was because he had never developed a concept of what misfortune was.

Looking back on it now, however, Otto shuddered at his own history. What in the world had he done in his past life, to be so abandoned by fortune?

???: “Big one, gone, gone now, it’s gone.”

???: “Shiny, shinied, shine is, faraway, shiny, shiny, shining.”

???: “Hey, monster’s coming. Hey, monster’s coming.”

It was around this time that the noises Otto was consciously blocking began to change, and the once senseless chorus became imbued with meaning. Although he still was not able to understand most of what he heard, in his efforts to transform confusion into comprehension, Otto discovered the true nature of the hell he had experienced in his early childhood.

Apparently, he could communicate with non-human creatures. Eleven years after its manifestation, Otto Suwen realized that he had this ability called the Divine Protection of the Soul of Language.

After that, hoping to discover the limits of the power bestowed upon him, Otto went all around town testing his Divine Protection. Over repeated bouts of trial and error, he found that the more intelligent the creature, the more clearly ideas could be communicated between them.

Then, he spoke with the family ground dragon in front of his older brother and confided that he’d had this ability since he was an infant.

Older Brother: “Uuh, okay. Right... So, um... Otto. That power is, um, something. Yeah, it’s really something, but... Well, just. Don’t use it where anyone can see you, okay?”

Possessing such a Divine Protection meant being blessed by the world, but not everyone welcomed the holders of such powers. It’d be one thing if the Divine Protection benefited many others, but Otto’s ability only applied to himself, and one could easily imagine all the childish mischief it could be used for.

Indeed, Otto agreed to his worried brother's suggestion. After promising his older brother, who had gone pale and was averting his eyes, Otto resolved to let no one else know about his Divine Protection.

His power was dangerous, not only to him, but to those around him as well.

A sense of duty lit up inside young Otto's heart: he must protect his beloved family.

Only three days after making his promise to his older brother, his Divine Protection of the Soul of Language became common knowledge, and all his peers shunned him entirely.

His younger brother caught him talking with the family ground dragon, and Otto reluctantly told him about his Divine Protection. Otto also told him about his older brother's concerns and that the power was incredibly dangerous.

The next day, his younger brother dragged him in front of a huge group of kids to brag about him. They watched him talk to a bug, and, for the first time in years, Otto saw hell again.

The downside to the Divine Protection of the Soul of Language was the use of the other creature's language was necessary for communication. Simply put, for Otto to talk to a ground dragon, he would have to bray like a ground dragon, and, to speak to a bug, he'd have to chirp like a bug.

It took only an instant for the name Zodda-Bug Boy to stick. From that point on, Otto sealed away his Divine Protection, never to use it again. Several years would pass before he managed to undo his tainted reputation and erase that accursed memory from everyone's minds.

When he finally achieved this, Otto was the delicate age of fourteen.

Being fourteen, all excuses for his mental immaturity stopped working. His body was steadily entering adulthood, and when his limbs had fully grown out, Otto could even be described as rather handsome.

Grey hair, and somewhat luckless, tender features. Mild eyes, and a disposition to put his all into everything he did. Young Otto had grown to possess surprisingly many characteristics that tickled the maternal instinct, and just when he began taking interest in romance, like any boy his age —

He made an enemy of the daughter of the most powerful figure in town using his Divine Protection of the Soul of Language and was banished from his hometown.

It was the winter he turned fifteen. Long story short, Otto had gotten himself involved in someone else's love scandal.

On the night of the powerful man's daughter's birthday party, the girl's boyfriend came storming in, roaring about her being with another man. His crosshairs immediately landed on Otto, who had been talking with her only moments earlier. Otto protested that he was honestly just asking her for the time, but the red-faced man lashing him with Zodda Bug Boy would hear none of it.

And when Otto heard his long-buried past suddenly dug up, even he lost his composure.

So, in order to completely clear his name, Otto unsealed his Divine Protection, and after listening to nearly every creature in town, he learned that the girl in question had been with seven different men that night and triumphantly told her hapless boyfriend— "Looks like you were the eighth!".

After the man gave him a thorough beating, the girl who had her romantic trysts exposed hired an assassin, and Otto was forced to flee the town that had seen his birth. Relying on his father's connections, he wound up working for an acquaintance's merchant company.

There, once he had learned the trade— Otto Suwen set out on his own as a travelling merchant at the age of sixteen.

Otto's journey as a travelling merchant could only be described as an uninterrupted series of misfortunes. His affinity for bad luck had not diminished over the years. He would be hit with bad weather whenever he transported fragile cargo, attacked by mountain bandits whenever he took shortcuts through the hills, and whenever he camped with other merchants, Otto would be the only one swarmed by blood-sucking insects.

The only reason Otto managed to survive these calamities was because his exceptional business ability counterbalanced his tragically poor luck.

He wasn't netting big profits, but he wasn't suffering debilitating losses either. With an uncanny sense of balance known as the bane of merchants, he managed to break exactly even, four years passing in the blink of an eye to land him at twenty years old.

The fact he never lost heart nor turned back was thanks to Frufoo, the ground dragon he'd known since he was little, whom he brought along when he was expelled from his hometown.

Honestly, Otto did have some complicated feelings about Frufoo, who was the reason his brothers found out his Divine Protection of the Soul of Language in the first place. But, for the present Otto, Frufoo was nothing less than his cherished and inseparable family.

For whatever reason, other merchants tended to shy away from teaming up with Otto, so he spent many sleepless nights speaking with Frufoo to keep his loneliness at bay. “Lad, lemme sleep already”, Frufoo would say, but Otto’s imploring always got him to stay awake for a little longer. Perhaps it was only natural that other merchants stayed well away when they saw Otto braying with his ground dragon by his fire in the dead of night.

While to a bystander, those days might seem rather uneventful, for Otto, it was a constant life and death struggle. Then one day, there came a turning point.

—He misjudged a business opportunity and utterly screwed up.

This time, Otto decided to peddle oil. It was nearly winter, so oil would sell for an outrageously high price up north in Gusteko, or so he heard from a red-faced man with a beard and an eyepatch. Otto traded all his metal wares for oil and triumphantly set his sights on Gusteko— when a sudden breakdown in diplomatic relations utterly destroyed any hope of selling his goods.

And to rub salt into his wounded heart, he quickly found out that the metal wares that he had previously struggled to sell were fetching exorbitant prices in the Capital.

Realizing that he’d been duped, Otto sensed that his travelling merchant’s life was in peril. Unless he could find a way to reverse his circumstances, he’d have no choice but to sell Frufoo. Not only that—it could even wind up with him come crying back to his family.

Otto could never allow that to happen.

It had been over five years since he last saw his family, but his love for them had not faded in the least. The fact that he could live his present life, as difficult as it may be, was all owing to his family, who never abandoned him as a child.

In the first ten years of his life, Otto had already given them a lifetime’s worth of trouble. So for those ten years of kindness, he was determined to spend the rest of his life to repay them. It was only right that debts should be repaid. After all, Otto Suwen was a merchant’s son.

—And so, when a trader he knew told him of an opportunity to make a quick profit, Otto took it.

This job wouldn't involve any merchandise, only his ground dragon's legwork. Someone was hiring dragon carriages to transport a large number of people from one place to another.

Without a second thought, Otto activated his Divine Protection of the Soul of Language and told Frufoo to rush there at full speed before anyone else. Zooming through shoddy roads, travelling along unmarked paths, and ignoring Frufoo's protests of "Let's stop already, wee bub", Otto managed to be the first to arrive. And,

???: "My my my... Just where are you going with such haste... DESU!?"

He fucked up.

A bunch of guys with deranged eyes tied him up and rolled him up in a mat, and it was then Otto realized that his misfortunes had truly, truly reached its peak. He was separated from Frufoo, stripped of his belongings, tossed into a cold cavern, and left there to wait for his joke of a life to be brought to an end.

Who could possibly understand the depth of the despair that submerged Otto's heart back then? Surely, no one.

In hopes of finding some way to escape from their evil clutches, Otto completely released the restraints on his Divine Protection of the Soul of Language as his last resort. But he was greeted by nothing but soul-crushing silence— For despite unleashing the full power of his Divine Protection of the Soul of Language and expecting to be met with the hell of early childhood...

That nostalgic, loathsome cacophony did not come.

The insects and small creatures that were supposed to be dwelling in these forests and caves were all hiding from that same evil presence— Witnessing a hell of an entirely different nature compared to his usual, Otto's heart fractured. His eyes lost their vigor, and all strength drained from his body. He knew that it was all over.

There was nothing he could do, and this cold cavern would be his end.

The despair was too great for tears. And, it was when he had grown numb to the passage of those empty hours, that Otto Suwen's fate was unexpectedly saved.

???: "What the! Those Witch Cult nutjobs really don't discriminate, huh! Wouldn't a expected any less, though!"

A booming voice reverberated through the cave, bringing Otto out of his trance, jolting him back to reality. Lifting his head, he feebly called for help. And it was a large, dog-faced beastman with a heavy Kararagi accent who heard his pleas.

Beastman: "Happy luck ya got, fella! Say we weren't coming, and no question that bunch'd had you slaughtered! Be thankful we weren't a lil' bit slower! Y'got saved by a hair! By a hair, boy! And o'course, give your thanks for the boss-kid!"

Otto: "B—Boss, kid?"

Rotating his once-bound limbs, Otto tilted his head at the boisterous beastman.

His eyes widened in response to Otto's doubts, before he smacked him in the back with his enormous palm, earning a wail from Otto.

Beastman: "Boss's a boss! Kid's a kid! Smack 'em both togetha'nd ya get a boss-kid! That is, the head-honcho, the guy ordering us to go up this far! He doesn't look like his head's chugging much anyways, but it looked like the people trusted him straigh'! Ghahahahaaha!"

Otto: "Ha, haa... U—understood. Anyway, thank you very much. And, right, I also have to..."

...Thank him as well, is how Otto meant to continue, when he noticed something.

The beastman was looking at him, and had scrunched his face up in surprise. Otto had no clue as to what this meant. The beastman withdrew a shockingly white napkin from his pocket and handed it over.

Beastman: "Whaddaya doin', say you're 'bout to cry, then go cry where ya can't be seen. Kinda pathetic if a man's there bawlin' in public."

Otto: "Wha, eh... C—crying?"

Beastman: “Yer eyes are filled o’teardrops! Whaddaya mean yer not cryin’! Is it sweat ya say!? Heart-sweat!? Fella, even us Kararagi folk have long quit usin’ that joke!”

The beastman turned his back to Otto, taking distance from him in a gesture of consideration. Otto put the cloth to his face, incredulous, to then witness the great volume of tears that the handkerchief caught— which sincerely surprised him.

The moment he realized he was crying, more and more did the tears overflow.

Otto: “Auh, shit... wh—what is, this... this... hk”

Otto clenched his teeth at the unstoppable torrent of tears as he pressed the cloth to his face. He could not understand why he was crying, a stream of incoherent curses fully filling his head.

—He’d been released from despair so intense his tears had dried up, and so perhaps accordingly, he was in tears now.

Otto: “I—I’m so glad, I... didn’t, die...”

He hadn’t achieved anything yet. He had not repaid a single one of his debts.

If he had died there, he would have ended, his life devoid of any meaning. As it never had.

It was because he survived it that he now recognized that fact.

—With every single teardrop shed, Otto keenly felt his life beginning again.

His first birthing cry, upon being given life in this world.

His second birthing cry, upon learning of his parents’ love, and the whereabouts of his own heart.

And his third, upon bypassing the death he had supposedly resolved himself for and comprehending what it meant to live for a purpose.

—Otto Suwen, on that day, screamed a birthing cry once again.

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Otto: “—It’s not like anyone asked me to buy time like this...”

Single-mindedly driving his overtaxed feet into the ground step after step, a wry smile rose on Otto’s face. As much as he wished to forget those memories of his unsightly bawling, every memory in which he was crying was far too important, and he could not forget them even if he tried.

Otto: “But I’ll repay my debts, no matter what— Because I’m a merchant, after all.”

—That youth who saved his life.

Otto Suwen owed Natsuki Subaru a debt that must be repaid.

For saving his life, Otto would move heaven and earth to repay him.

It was only natural for a merchant to think this way. And, more importantly—

Otto: “—Because he’s my friend!!”

Both as a merchant and an independent human being, Otto ordered himself to stay true here and now.

It was a battle he was unlikely to win. Nevertheless, against all odds, Otto Suwen chose to wager his very existence on Natsuki Subaru’s victory.

That was the will of his merchant soul, and a testament to their friendship.

—Far off in the distance, from the direction of the abandoned carriages, Otto heard the raging roars of a beast.

Sensing that the true battle had now begun, Otto unleashed his Divine Protection— and, offering himself to that all-familiar hell, intent on giving this fight his all, he ran.

Arc 4 Chapter 107 - The Final Trap

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 13, Chapter 5 “Otto Suwen”, Part 4

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#)

Subaru: “Alright, then I’ll count on you to delay him like we planned.”

After safely finding Ryuzu and rejoining Otto, Subaru gave the signal to put the plans they’ve been preparing for over the past few days into motion.

Otto: “I’ve no problem with that, but do you have any idea where Emilia-sama is? If you cannot find her before time runs out, everything we’ve done will be for naught...”

Subaru: “Can’t say it’ll go without a hitch... I mean, it’s because of all the hitches that we are in this situation. But, well, you don’t need to worry about it.”

Scratching his head, Subaru’s face stiffened into a rather miserable expression.

Whenever Subaru’s eyes sharpened into a serious expression, it gave off the impression that he was mad about something.

While Otto hadn’t known him for long, he knew him well enough not to misunderstand that expression, but it didn’t stop him from feeling some pity for the owner of those unfortunate features. And actually, Subaru felt the same about Otto. The fact that Otto didn’t realize this was just one of the subtle things they have in common.

Subaru: “I think I have an idea where Emilia might be. Honestly, I panicked pretty hard when I found out she was gone, but... now that I’ve calmed down, I’m pretty confident I can find her.”

Otto: “Is, that right. So where do y... Or, maybe it’s better if I don’t know.”

Subaru: “You sure? You know I wouldn’t mind bragging some more and having you fawn over my deductive abilities?”

Otto: “No, I’m good. I don’t feel like fawning today, and if Garfiel manages to catch me, it wouldn’t be good if I start spilling everything, now would it?”

Otto pointed out with a shrug, while Subaru nodded.

Indeed, it would be rather worrying. Otto doesn’t have a great deal of tolerance towards pain, and he hadn’t experienced a whole lot of extreme pain in his past. If Garfiel corners him and starts hurting him, chances are Otto will spill everything he knows. And Otto didn’t want to sabotage Subaru like that.

Subaru: “Well, if you are sure you are gonna spill it, I guess it can’t be helped.”

Otto: “———”

Without much ceremony, Subaru simply said “No worries, I have complete faith in you.”.

Just what is a person supposed to think when they hear something like that?

Receiving this kind of blind trust, who could bring themselves to betray it?

And, saying such things without regard to how the listener might feel, Subaru truly is an outrageous friend.

Otto: “Either way... I’ll definitely do my best. I’m banking my entire future on you pulling this off, you know.”

Subaru: “Yeah. If I royally screw this up, your future’s going straight to rock bottom... But if it gets too dangerous, just run away. That guy’s not gonna play around today.”

Otto: “...Mm, I’ll keep that in mind.”

Otto answered those considerate words with a faint grin.

Everything was ready according to plan. The Arlam refugees have been instructed to board their respective dragon carriages and to leave shortly after the bait, Otto, departs. Otto had loaded two

carriages with the villagers' spare clothing in order to convince Garfiel's nose that the villagers are with him, and he would be travelling on the most conspicuous path to draw his attention. The refugee escape routes that he had spent those sleepless nights scouting had also been firmly drilled into the ground dragons.

Nothing should be amiss now. All that was left was to be the bait until the refugees escape the Sanctuary.

That would put them a safe distance away from the Great Rabbit's attack two days from now. Meanwhile, Subaru and Emilia would have a chance to talk, and Garfiel would return to the village, find Subaru, and probably turn the whole place into a battleground---

Otto: "-----"

Except, Otto was determined not to let that happen.

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Physical prowess was never Otto Suwen's strong suit. He had learned some self-defense techniques to keep himself safe on his travels, but, compared to someone who lives and breathes combat, Otto wasn't just one or two steps behind.

He never neglected to hire bodyguards when transporting valuable cargo, and when he was attacked by mountain bandits while taking a shortcut through the hills, he tearfully abandoned his luggage and fled.

Everyone knew Otto lacked the aptitude to solve anything through brute force.

Otto: "So what on earth am I doing picking a fight with a guy like this..."

Wiping the cold sweat from his forehead, Otto wrenched his rigid cheeks into a smile. As a rule, merchants always smile in the face of adversity. Born into a merchant family, Otto was raised on that precept, though he only had the latter half of his life to live by it. Nevertheless, it was not the kind of custom to be broken lightly.

If he could smile and convince himself that this was no different from any of the challenges he'd faced before, then his body would come to accept this stress as something good.

His arms were moving, so were his legs. He could still run some more.

It's a mystery how he has managed to keep running across such terrible ground, and not be out of breath. The lightness of his sobered heart allows yet another unseen ability of Otto's to bloom.

Otto: "Still, I cannot get complacent. Conceit is useless, and carelessness is the enemy."

Speeding through the gaps between the trees, Otto reminded himself to stay ever vigilant.

He had left Garfiel a long way behind him. But Otto can't keep running away like this. His job was to draw Garfiel's attention and prevent him from returning to the Sanctuary. Garfiel must not be allowed to realize the pointlessness of chasing him.

By hiding in the forest and hitting Garfiel with one trap after another, Otto must work to keep himself at the forefront of Garfiel's mind.

Indeed, Garfiel had no need to chase after Otto. Achieving his objective of preventing the Sanctuary's liberation was easily attainable by suppressing Subaru and Emilia. Otto was only a distraction. The fact that Garfiel hadn't paid Otto any attention thus far was precisely because he understood this better than anyone.

A screen of leaves and a fire stone. And the swarm of winged insects bursting from the carriage. With these flashy yet harmless traps, Otto had perfectly succeeded in enraging Garfiel. And so, the present Garfiel had lost his composure and was focusing his sights on Otto alone, completely forgetting he had no need to do so.

Otto: "That said, it won't take him long to notice it if given the chance."

And so, without risking getting too close to Garfiel, Otto must keep provoking him from a distance.

With Garfiel's nose disabled, Otto should be able to avoid any life-threatening situations provided he keeps out of sight. But, if he's spotted, Garfiel would be able to close the distance in an instant—the discrepancy in ability between them was far too overwhelming.

Indeed, it would require the caution of walking a tightrope.

Otto: "———"

Hidden in the foliage, Otto peered out at the scene before him.

Some twenty meters away was Garfiel, leering over his surroundings. It seems his sense of smell was completely gone thanks to the pungent Kisin oil spilled near the carriage wheels. He was searching for Otto relying on vision alone, frustrated, and carrying the air of a wounded beast.

It'd be playing with fire to draw his attention now, just asking to be burned.

Otto: "Now, I'm counting on you!"

???: "*Rightright*~~"

Otto lightly whispered and heard the reply upon his eardrums instantly transformed into meaning. Heeding Otto's signal, the trees began to stir.

Garfiel: "Ahh...?"

Hearing the rustling of leaves and sensing that something was afoot, Garfiel looked up—

—And saw a massive barrage of globs of mud and excrement flying straight at his face from the surrounding trees.

It was a show of force by the little critters living high in those trees— the wood mice.

Of course, the projectiles themselves dealt no damage whatsoever, but seeing feces flying at him from all directions, even Garfiel tried to leap out of the way in a panic. He couldn't avoid them all, however, as several projectiles splashed on his legs, prompting clicks of his tongue.

Garfiel: "Th'fuck is this! Shit! Why are th... That lil'fucker's behind this, isn't he..."

Scraping off the filth on his feet on a nearby tree, Garfiel immediately wondered if this was Otto's doing. But then, Garfiel scrunched his nose mid-sentence as if having noticed something.

—The wood mice's poop balls were pretty much harmless. They were just staining his clothes and making them stink. But the scent of their droppings has a tendency to attract the insects of this forest.

Garfiel: "———Guh!"

Something wriggled up to Garfiel from beneath the ground before leaping out of the earth and tangling itself around his foot. When he saw that it was a long, black, centipede-like insect crawling up his leg—his breathing stopped. As long as a regular human's arm, the centipede wound its way up Garfiel's left knee as its grotesque mandibles slurped greedily over the traces of wood mice droppings.

Garfiel: "Gaah! Gross!"

Brandishing his claws, Garfiel swiped the centipede off him. But more and more crawled out of the ground, not only leaping onto Garfiel's legs, but fighting over the puddle of droppings that had missed him, covering the entire area in a hellish brawl.

Centipedes love the fruit seeds inside wood mice droppings, that was one of the useful facts Otto had learned over his conversations with the woodland creatures during his treks through the forest. Contrary to their repulsive appearance, the centipedes aren't carnivores and aren't venomous at all, but being swarmed by them was still more than enough to constitute a threat. And, by now—

Garfiel: "—Kh! Agh! Get th'fuck off!!"

—Garfiel was screaming hysterically at the horde of centipedes, sending spit flying. Then, he raised his right leg and drove it into the ground with all his strength.

The next instant, a square plot of earth with Garfiel at its center sprang into the air.

Otto: "——"

Witnessing this preposterous sight, Otto unwittingly gulped.

Furiously swiping his claws and legs upon the airborne soil, Garfiel made short work of the stunned centipedes left and right. And, when the floating platform crashed back to the ground, all the centipedes around him had been neutralized while the rest scurried into the earth in fear.

The trees that were the wood mice's homes toppled towards the uprooted earth as the inhabitants who had aided Otto scrambled to flee.

It seems they wound up paying quite a high price for the sugar water they got.

Otto: “Well, I suppose that’s just another outcome of trade... or really, being that it depends on the negotiator’s abilities whether or not a business deal is a profitable deal, I’d prefer I not be resented here.

Bearing witness to this glimpse of Garfiel’s strength, Otto quietly apologized in an effort to calm himself. Then, silencing himself once more, Otto retreated to keep his distance from the approaching Garfiel and prepared to lure him to the next trap.

He hadn’t gone two and a half days without sleeping scouting around this forest for nothing.

—And once all this is over, he plans to sleep so furiously that not a dream could disturb him.

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???: “*A big one’s coming.*”

—I know, yes, I know already.

???: “*Behind you, big one, coming, coming now.*”

—I said I know already, I assure you I’m keeping that in mind.

???: “*You’ll die. You are so dead. Poor thing.*”

—You mind not being so pessimistic!?

With his Divine Protection of the Soul of Language unleashed, a din of discordant noises flooded Otto’s ears as he ran. These were the voices of the bugs, the critters, and indeed all sentient creatures living within the forest, while, with extreme difficulty, Otto sifted for the ones most relevant to himself.

It’s been twenty years since he first discovered his Divine Protection, and ten years since he became proficient with it. And, in all that time, he had never used it so recklessly. The time he unleashed it in order to clear his name, he was inside a city where the number of creatures was limited.

But here, inside the expansive forest, the volume far exceeded Otto’s capacity to endure.

In the air, in the trees, in the leaves, in the soil and in the rocks, there were countless dwelling places for the critters and bugs. Listening to the noises of all these hidden creatures was like having over a hundred human voices simultaneously assailing his mind.

It wasn't just hearing, either. The Divine Protection of the Soul of Language demanded comprehension from Otto. Which meant that Otto's brain had to expend itself to process everything his Divine Protection was picking up.

Otto: "Buh... Ugh."

A sharp pain raced through his head causing his body to sway. He leaned against a tree, wiping the sweat from his face, and saw drops of blood soaking into his sleeve. A nosebleed. The blood leaking from his face was proof that his brain was working beyond its limit. The intermittent migraines and the ringing in his ears were showing no signs of dwindling.

Otto: "Ah... I didn't know. So this is what happens if I keep using it, this Divine Protection of mine. Gets pretty unwieldy, doesn't it... It isn't all nice and convenient, that's for sure. What a pain..."

Roughly wiping away his nosebleed and rubbing his brow, Otto resumed his faltering run.

His ears continued to ring, but he had no intention of shutting off his Divine Protection. Otto cannot keep up this chase scene by himself. As mentioned before, the voices keep him informed of Garfiel's movements. They serve as Otto's eyes since he couldn't constantly look behind him.

He wasn't sure what other people thought about enlisting the help of bugs and mammals, creatures whose wills differ from humans, but it was no easy task.

Their thought patterns are different from that of humans, after all. Different things delight and upset them. What one finds normal another might find outrageous. And there is no way to know which weapons to use when negotiating with them. Even with insects and animals, the greater their intelligence, the greater were the individual differences between them. Just depending on the region, bugs of the same species could have completely different preferences.

It was thanks to all the effort he'd put into his short but vital preparation beforehand that Otto was able keep up his imperfect but successful evasion of Garfiel.

—“Has Subaru found Emilia, and have they properly talked yet?”, he wondered.

The purpose was to give them time to talk—and, in order to prolong it for just a little longer, that Otto was putting himself through this hardship.

If Subaru’s guess was wrong, and he hadn’t gotten any closer to finding Emilia, then all of this would have been for nothing.

Just why was he doing all this for Subaru?

As his mind wandered to distract itself from the pain, Otto landed on this thought.

Subaru saved his life, and Otto was helping him in order to repay that debt. That was the truth.

Subaru accepted him as a friend and requested his aid, so it was only natural that Otto chose to help him. That was also the truth.

But was Otto truly such a zealous man that, off only those reasons alone, he would achieve more than what was demanded of him?

Otto: “...Ahh, I see.”

Something flashed across his mind in that instant, then suddenly everything made sense.

It’s all very simple. Otto’s reason for having faith in Subaru, and helping him, was ludicrously superficial.

Otto: “Clutching your head, giving up, thinking that no one could understand you... I was supposed to know that feeling better than anyone.”

The Divine Protection of the Soul of Language was the power to hear what others could not.

Because he could hear the voices of other creatures and know things he normally shouldn’t, Otto was seen as a nuisance by many people. He lost the people who were once his friends, and he could no longer see his family. To Otto, his Divine Protection was nothing more than a superfluous tool that was useless outside of emergencies.

But, because he had this Divine Protection, his experiences changed. The experience of being excluded due to his Divine Protection taught Otto the pain of being misunderstood by others. He knew the frustration of knowing something but being unable to communicate it to anyone. And it had conferred him the resigned outlook that no one would understand anyway.

All of this was the same for Subaru before he revealed everything to Otto.

That was why Otto trusted him. And, reflecting on just how much that youth and his past self overlapped, Otto started running once more.

That's all there is to it.

Otto didn't just want to save Natsuki Subaru. Through him, Otto wanted to save his own past self, to save Otto Suwen.

???: "Fin'lly, fuckin'... found ya!!"

Otto: "—Guh!?"

The moment he recognized yet another one of his truest thoughts, Otto heard a voice outside his Divine Protection of the Soul of Language as an impact struck his shoulder, sending him tumbling across the ground.

Rolling sideways, he eventually came to a stop on the soft earth.

Otto: "Buh, pffff! Wh—what... guh!"

Garfiel: "Too fuckin' bad, ain't it!"

Spitting out the leaves in his mouth, Otto tried to push himself up, when a foot drove into his torso. Another kick, wrenching all the air from his lungs, sent him violently skidding over the earth.

Up and down jumbled into one as his head spun so fast that his thoughts grew vague. No oxygen cycled through his brain, the blood in his body congealed, while his veins dispensed only pain throughout his being.

Garfiel: “My nose may be broke, but I still got ears. Whatever trick yer pullin’, th’goddamn bugs are chirpin’ wherever y’go... But this ends here, yeah?”

Otto: “I—I wonder... Just because you caught up, doesn’t mean you’ve won...”

Garfiel: “Don’t be a smartass. Y’put up a good fight... but I ain’t gonna waste my time no more.”

Garfiel set his foot on Otto’s stomach and leaned in. Ribs creaked as the foot pressed down with a force greater than the weight of Garfiel’s scrawny figure, prompting wails of pain as Otto’s limbs convulsed helplessly.

Garfiel: “If I step on ya with all I’ve got, you’ll be squashed t’smithereens. Y’saw me launch th’ground into th’air back there, yeah? Same shit’s gonna happen to yer body. Wanna try?”

Otto: “—Sorry, but I’d rather not.”

Seeing Otto answer his threat with a defiant smile, Garfiel was slightly taken aback.

Garfiel: “Hell, y’got some guts, don’t ya. If I knew that before y’pulled this shit, we wouldn’t’ve needed this goddamn runaround.”

Otto: “...”

Garfiel’s words could almost be called a compliment.

Hearing this, Otto rolled his head and spilled a small sigh. Watching Otto faintly breathing, Garfiel narrowed his eyes.

Garfiel: “If there weren’t so goddamn many of’em, I probably wouldn’t’ve thought anythin’ of it...”

Otto: “———”

Garfiel: “But soon as I was chasin’ ya, it’s like th’whole forest’s turned’gainst me. Even at the start when y’threw those leaves, the bugs under’em all flew at me. Th’bugs in th’dragon carriage, those squirrels throwin’ shit at me, th’centipedes, th’snakes swarmin’ outta dead trees, th’birds lurin’ me to a field of poison flowers, there’s gotta be some way t’explain it.”

One-by-one, Garfiel recounted the traps he had encountered in the forest. While, listening, Otto only continued faintly breathing.

Those were all traps Otto had set during his treks through the forest, designed to hinder Garfiel and to stall for time. None of them missed their mark, and all of them succeeded in drawing Garfiel here. If it weren't for the fact that there were too many of those natural anomalies for it to be mere coincidence, Garfiel would never have believed that Otto was behind it.

Garfiel: "Thinkin' ain't my strong suit, but t'survive, I gotta think anyway. So I thought. And thought, and thought, and here's what I got. When inexplicable things happen in this world, it's usually 'cause some Divine Protection's involved— Y'got one of those Divine Protections, don't ya."

Otto: "...Uff."

Garfiel: "D'vine Protection of th'Forest, Divine Protection of Dirt or whatever th'fuck y'call it, if y'got one then this all makes sense. 'n ya really weren't holdin' back, were ya... So."

Striking the silent Otto with these words, Garfiel gave his trembling body a kick, then glanced behind him, his sharp eyes narrowing in pity.

Garfiel: "Don't think I haven't noticed what yer plannin' behind those stubborn eyes of yer's."

Otto: "———"

Garfiel's eyes landed on an open clearing where a mass of white light had gathered.

It was not sunlight that had filtered through the trees, but a radiant mass of Mana so dense it was visible to the naked eye. Gazing at the swelling mass that could drive a person mad should they wander too close, Garfiel scowled and looked back down at Otto.

Garfiel: "That's yer trump card, ain't it. It ain't like th'empty threats you've been throwin' around so far. That's somethin' that can do me in... If ya were th'one who's got me on th'ground, y'might even be able to shove me into it."

Otto: "...Ah, ugh."

Squatting down, Garfiel picked up the groaning Otto by the collar.

Blood from Otto's overworked brain poured from his nostrils, staining the bottom half of his face grisly red. Seeing this, Garfiel shook his head.

Garfiel: "Y'tried, but yer way outta yer league. Shoulda known yer place like a good boy."

Otto: "My... place, you say..."

Garfiel: "Yeah. Y'ain't got no chance against me— Whatever that trap's supposed t'be, yer th'one who's gonna be eatin' it."

With that, Garfiel gave Otto's body a gentle toss.

Following a brief weightless sensation of falling through the air, Otto's body crashed to the ground and rolled into the pool of dense, white Mana. Inside the thick, drifting cloud, the Mana began to infect Otto's already vague consciousness.

His eyes rolled, his tongue numbed, and his nosebleed streamed without end.

The trap. The final trap. Now that he was tossed inside—

Garfiel: "I'll watch till it's over."

Crossing his arms, Garfiel waited to see Otto's end.

Where am I? What am I doing here? Lying on his stomach, catching Garfiel in the corner of his vision, Otto gathered his scattered thoughts. And then, he understood.

—The final trap was ready.

Otto: "...Mind if I ask you something?"

Garfiel: "Hah?"

Pressing his hands to the ground, Otto desperately pushed himself up.

Not expecting him to still be able to move, Garfiel's eyes widened in shock. It gave Otto some small satisfaction to see this, and indeed, Subaru was right.

Doing something no one believed you could really is fun. That is a fact. It truly was unkind, but this delight shows no signs of stopping.

Otto: “On your way here, Garfiel-san... how many trees have you felled, and how much earth have you gouged open?”

Garfiel: “Th’fuck are y’talkin’ about?”

Otto: “All this Mana floating around me... is just how much you’ve angered the forest.”

The sense of accomplishment made him forget all about his fatigue and pain.

Sitting himself up on the ground, Otto’s faltering voice grew firm as he looked up at Garfiel.

Garfiel uncrossed his arms, his face twitching as realized he had done exactly what Otto wanted him to, and immediately tried to move— But it was too late.

Otto: “—Al, Dona.”

Abounding Mana coursed through Otto’s entire body, taking shape in the world at the sound of his chant.

—With overwhelming speed and momentum, a torrent of earth poured forth, slamming into Garfiel’s body as he belatedly tried to dodge, sending him flying to the other edge of the forest.

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Otto: “Haa... haa... haa... Ah.”

His outstretched arms still trembling, Otto’s labored breaths were thick with exhaustion and blood. All the Mana drifting around him had been siphoned into his spell. The sensation of being intoxicated by Mana had faded, replaced by fatigue and all-encompassing agony.

—Otto’s final trap was the essence of all the traps that came before it.

To enlist the help of the bugs and animals of the forest, Otto proposed that they punish the evil presence tyrannizing these woods.

It seems the wanton devastation left by Garfiel's daily strolls had raised the ire of the forest's inhabitants. Cutting down trees to sharpen his claws and train his body, or even just going around collecting firewood for the village, taken from a wider perspective, these were acts of destruction upon the animals' home.

Little-by-little, these heinous deeds piled up until Garfiel was eventually considered an archenemy by the majority of the creatures in this forest.

So Otto negotiated with those creatures, offering to punish Garfiel with their help. As trap after trap was sprung and Garfiel inflicted more and more damage upon the forest—the forest's residents pooled their Mana into one location, lending Otto their utmost support as promised.

The giant mass of Mana was so conspicuous that it could only be a trap.

After triggering so many traps on his way to this place, Garfiel instinctively avoided this one and tossed Otto into it instead. With the aid of the forest's creatures, Otto was able to cast magic he'd otherwise have no way of casting.

The resulting torrent of earth and debris slammed into Garfiel, dealing decisive damage to his thus-far unscathed body.

Garfiel believed that Otto had no strength to oppose him, got careless, and facilitated his own downfall.

Everything had gone as Otto planned. Which means,

Otto: "This time..."

???: "—Yer outta moves."

Otto spilled a despondent sigh as Garfiel's figure emerged from the tree line, glaring back at him.

His clothes were torn, and his exposed skin was marked by cuts made by jagged rocks. But his head and other vital places were unharmed, and there was no obvious impact on his gait. The sheer disparity in strength far transcended Otto's imaginings.

Garfiel: "Honesty, I'm damn surprised."

Otto: "...Are you, now?"

Garfiel: "I really didn't think you had it in ya. Hell, I looked down on ya, thinkin' you've given up—
Forgive me. I pulled some stupid shit while I'm actually dealin' with a man."

Garfiel said with a meek expression. But Otto shook his head, indicating there was no need to apologize. All he wanted to hear was "I concede". But, despite giving it his all and fulfilling his role perfectly, he still failed to defeat Garfiel.

And so, this is where Otto's resistance ends.

Garfiel felt his hands, then flashed his razor claws. He would not show Otto mercy this time. Their sharp edges shall reflect his sincerity. They would strike true, carve into Otto's flesh, and extinguish his life.

—I did everything I could, right?

Otto was sure he had played every card he had.

His Divine Protection, his debts of friendship, he had used all of it. If he still fell short in the end, there was nothing he could do. Otto's capabilities ended here.

And so—

Garfiel: "See ya— When y'wake up, you'll start all over."

Otto: "This is where my solo fight ends, I guess..."

Garfiel: "——"

Muttering under his breath, Otto closed his eyes, exhausted.

Yet his attitude was nothing like resignation towards death—

Garfiel: "No way..."

Is there more? Garfiel shuddered with all the hair on his body standing on end as he warily scanned his surroundings.

There was no sign of anything in any direction. If there is more to it, then—

Garfiel: “———Hk!”

Baring his fangs, Garfiel swiped his claws upwards. Drawing in a breath, he expanded his lung so he may howl. But there, he hesitated. His eyes widened, yet no roar escaped his open lips.

What escaped was not bloodlust, not hostility, but a name.

???: “Garf——!!”

A shadow leapt from the treetop overhead, falling towards him.

Its short skirt fluttering in the air, the point of its wand aimed straight for Garfiel’s head.

Watching the shining Mana gathering at the tip of the wand, Garfiel expelled his shriek.

Garfiel: “Why th’fuck are y... RaaaaaaaaaAAAAAAMMMMMM!!”

The next instant, blades of wind burst forth, scattering the Sanctuary’s forest to the gales.



Illustration from Volume 13, coloring by Xarlasar ([source](#))

Arc 4 Chapter 108 - A Man of Only Good Timing

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 13, Chapter 5 “Otto Suwen”, Part 4 (until halfway)

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)

Through the Mana congregating at the tip of the wand, the chant rewrote the world—

Whistling wind became blades, cycling towards the eye of the storm, dispensing destruction in its wake.

Garfiel: “———!!”

At the center of the maelstrom— the target of the whirling blades, Garfiel roared into the sky.

The razors struck at Garfiel’s torso, shearing at his adamant flesh. Blood spilled from the gashes, but his timely leap saved him from being cut in twain.

Presented with a choice between counterattacking and evading, Garfiel immediately chose to flee. Even as hesitation flickered in his eyes, he shielded his head with his arms and slid out of the wind blades’ path.

But these ambushing blades had been launched with the intent to decide the fight.

The wind did not allow Garfiel an easy escape as it vigorously hounded his retreat. Kicking off the ground, he clicked his tongue at the invisible slashes.

Garfiel: “Fuckin’, damn it——!”

The moment he landed, Garfiel screamed as he met the incoming wind blades head on.

Driving his heels into the ground, his foot as the axle, a rectangular section of ground tilted upwards and sprung into the air. The wind blades crashed into the uprooted soil and took a layer off its surface before dispersing.

Obeying gravity, the floating platform collapsed to the ground, sending up billows of dust. Witnessing such a ludicrous scene, any average person would have fallen speechless and dumb.

But the attacker was no average person, and this wasn't the first time she'd seen Garfiel do this.

Ram: "Sh!"

Garfiel: "Tch!"

Bursting out of the plumes of dust was a girl, her short skirt fluttering. Beneath her neat, peach-colored hair, cerise irises gleamed with indomitable resolve. Mana exuded from the tip of her wand, warping the very atmosphere and sending out blades of wind.

It extends to greater length than one glance would suggest, handled with precision befitting a maestro of Wind Magic. Contrary to their fragile appearance, the wind blades' slashes are more powerful than that of an average sword blade. Garfiel readied his claws at his hips, preparing to intercept, but even his claws would be at a disadvantage against those blades.

Keeping this pose, Garfiel lowered his stance in preparation for another backward leap. But his movement was interrupted by Ram's off-hand strike.

Ram: "Fula!"

Garfiel: "Ghk!?"

A short chant. A strike from the lowest class of Wind Magic. The attack struck Garfiel from behind, staggering him before he could take a single step backwards. It dealt no damage. But it had stopped him.

Garfiel looked up just in time to see Ram swinging down her blade—

Garfiel: "——"

What's the best course of action here? Before he could consider this question, Garfiel's body moved.

His claws and fangs, his innate weapons, would not be enough to counter the wind blades. And, being caught off guard, it was too late to dodge now. Which left him only one option.

Garfiel: “Rrrrrrraaaaaaaaghhhh!!”

Roaring, Garfiel lunged forward, clamping his hands together to catch the invisible sword between his palms. Catching a sword bare-handed works against regular swords, but when facing an invisible and incorporeal blade, it’s not so clear whether it’ll do any good.

Nevertheless, although the blade was made of wind, it certainly existed in the physical realm. Clamping the blade’s edge between his palms, Garfiel disrupted its course, and instead of being sliced clean in half, he got away with only a few lacerations on his skin.

“The attack has been foiled”, Ram judged belatedly.

Garfiel: “Too... fuckin’ close!”

Garfiel shot out a front kick aimed straight for Ram’s torso as she landed.

His leg pierced through the air with force enough to shatter a mountainside, but it would not reach Ram, who bent back her body to dodge. Reclining so far that she might as well be lying on the ground, Ram whipped out another wind blade aimed at Garfiel’s foot.

Garfiel: “———Hkk!”

On one foot, Garfiel leapt up, avoiding the strike that would’ve severed his limb from the ankle down. He successfully dodged Ram’s blade, but,

Ram: “Your feet are off the ground.”

The instant her whisper grazed his ears, a heel struck Garfiel’s body from above, knocking him back to the ground. This offbeat attack came from Ram, who dove out of her post-swing stance, launching herself and her leg out forward while rotating on the vertical.

Unable to avoid the strike in mid-air, all Garfiel could do was hold up his arms to shield himself. The bones in his arm creaked as he was sent shooting back, bouncing off the earth and crashing to a stop against a tree trunk.

With the air knocked out of his lungs, Garfiel glared at Ram, his golden pupils burning with rage. But,

Ram: “Ul Fula.”

An overwhelming windstorm capable of crushing a whole region of the forest swept up— with Garfiel at its center, lashing him and the woodlands alike with its invisible fury.

Garfiel: “Guh, gah— Hk!”

The raging wind stuck at Garfiel’s body, cutting him, tossing him, smashing him against the ravaged trees.

Tossed to the point that he could no longer tell up from down and left from right, being separated from the ground left Garfiel devoid of means to defend himself, and devoid of options but to be helplessly trounced by Ram’s magic.

When the wind had stopped and the violence of the storm had passed, Garfiel was left barely able to stand. Covered in blood, his head tilted back as he fell to his knees, his consciousness halfway gone.

Caught by perfect traps, he had taken two hits of ultimate-tier magic.

The very fact that he was still alive was a testament to his surprising vitality. His opponent must have expected this and so neglected to show any mercy.

Confirming the damage on Garfiel, Ram relinquished a small sigh. Then, she turned her gaze to Otto behind her, who had watched the entire surprise attack unfold.

Ram: “I already knew this, but you look so pathetic it’s painful to watch.”

Otto: “Surely that’s not something you say to someone who had just fought with his whole heart and soul...”

Ram: “Results are the only thing that matter. Did your efforts succeed or fail? The process you took to get here is secondary... So I’ll say it again, you look so pathetic it’s painful to watch.”

Otto: “Oof, she really is merciless... It’s just as Natsuki-san said.”

Without showing the slightest appreciation for Otto’s efforts, Ram gave him a wry smile and a little snort instead.

As the result of his fierce battle, Otto did manage to do some damage to Garfiel. Aside from the string of minor traps that only served to aggravate him, that final strike did carry enough force to conceivably defeat Garfiel. But, if there was one thing Otto miscalculated,

Ram: "It seems you forgot about Garf's Divine Protection of Earth Spirits."

Otto: "Earth Spirits... what's that?"

Hearing that question, Ram let out a small sigh. She shook her head as if appalled, looked down on Otto with a gaze of heartfelt contempt, and then sighed again.

Otto: "How much disappointment are you going to show!? I'm feeling seriously wounded here!"

Ram: "Garf's Divine Protection of Earth Spirits is just as its name suggests, it is a Divine Protection that bestows him the earth's blessing. As long as his feet are touching the ground, his body is protected by a shield of resilient soil— And even if not for that, Earth Magic has terrible affinity against him. You used an A1-class spell, and it just had to be Dona..."

Pressing her hand to her forehead, Ram closed her eyes and dropped her head.

Ram: "Your luck is so poor that I don't even feel pity anymore."

Otto: "So my lifelong misfortune finally detonated at this point!? That's super terrifying! Or actually, Ram-san, if you knew about this beforehand, wouldn't it have helped a lot more if you told me this beforehand!?"

Ram: "Don't you mean, Ram-sama?"

Otto: "Why is everyone trying to kick me to the lowest possible stratum!?"

Ignoring the raving Otto, Ram swished the tip of her wand as she turned back to deal with Garfiel.

He should be unconscious, but his limitless stamina was truly worthy of admiration. Without a doubt, he was the greatest obstacle to the Sanctuary's liberation. He must be restrained immediately and kept under strict supervision until matters can be—

Ram: "..."

Ram stopped in her approach, her brows slightly furrowed. Her pursed lips felt the dry air, her red tongue peeked out for just a glimpse.

Ram: "Garf."

Garfiel: "...I'll be damned. Ya really, truly are a merciless woman, you."

Garfiel lifted his slumped head in response to Ram's call. His sharp, opening eyes blazed with fury and hate, and his bared canine fangs were quietly rattling, indicating his will to fight hadn't waned.

The surprise attack should have been a perfect success. It couldn't have possibly gone any better.

And yet, it nevertheless failed to defeat this monster known as Garfiel.

Blood was pouring from his body profusely, yet he hopped to his feet without the faintest suggestion of injury or fatigue. Everything the wind blades had done to him was entirely superficial. Shallow gashes riddled his skin, and his non-vital areas had taken countless blows, but none of the damage was enough to decisively incapacitate him.

Garfiel: "When y'had me pressed against'a tree and sang that chant, I thought I was absolutely done for. My mind was turnin' with all its might that moment. But I couldn't come up with a single goddamn answer... so, I stopped thinkin'."

No longer fussing over his trifling thoughts, he trusted his body to evade for him. His instincts greedily elected to survive and magnificently operated his body to take minimal damage in that inescapable storm.

This was the fruition of the racial instincts of a lifeform fit for war.

Even Ram gave an imperceptible gulp at his remarkable battle-sense behind her deadpan expression.

For Ram, who took pride in always being able to prevail with better judgement even when at a disadvantage in terms of pure ability, it was a rare experience to face an opponent who was her equal.

And the fact that it was Garfiel only contributed to the indescribable emotion rising inside her.

Garfiel: "Say, Ram. Why are y'takin their side? What's gone 'n made y'do that?"

Ram: “———”

Garfiel: “Ya realize, right? Yer takin’ th’side of the ones plottin’ t’liberate th’Sanctuary. Ain’t that goin’ against that bastard Roswaal’s will? That asshole... at least, right now, he shouldn’t be wantin’ the Sanctuary t’be liberated.”

Ram: “Do you mean to suggest you’ve a better understanding of Roswaal-sama’s will in my presence, Garf? We’ve known each other for a long time, so surely you would know. I will not stand and listen to such insolent drivel.”

Garfiel: “I know how stubborn y’are. It’s why I fell in love with ya. And that’s why I just can’t accept this. If y’ain’t givin’ up on idolizin’ Roswaal, why are y’takin their side? How’d they talk y’into it?”

Listening to Garfiel’s words, Ram closed her eyes.

It was rare to see Ram’s lips tremble like this as if she was suppressing some inexplicable emotion. Garfiel’s eyes widened at this sight, but the expression vanished in only an instant.

Ram: “Ram... Ram is merely acting in the most meaningful manner for her wish. That is all.”

Garfiel: “And yer wish... is?”

Ram: “To fulfill Roswaal-sama’s most earnest desire, of course—— And nothing else.”

Hearing this answer, Garfiel expelled a deep sigh.

Ram had no interest in discussing this apparent contradiction any further. No one could possibly understand what was going through Ram’s mind. Except perhaps the one man who had read the deepest core of her heart, and convinced her to do this——

Ram: “He truly is an aggravating man, that Barusu... Though not even I understand why that is.”

Ram harbored an indescribable aggravation towards Subaru. Perhaps it was physiological revulsion, or perhaps disdain fostered over the time they’d spent together, or perhaps a little of both, but Ram had to think that it was ingrained in something deeper.

Almost as if he were a hated enemy who stole something precious from her— That was the inexplicable emotion Ram felt towards Subaru.

Nevertheless, Ram accepted Subaru's invitation, for that was just how deeply his proposal shook the core of her heart.

Ram: "Surely you've recovered enough to stand?"

Otto: "T—that's a pretty harsh thing to ask... I mean, I wouldn't mind if you could hit me with some healing magic..."

Ram: "Don't worry. Healing magic is outside my abilities. As there had never been necessity for me to learn it."

Otto: "You are the first maid I've met who's so unconcerned about healing!"

Wailing, Otto strained his trembling legs to stand. His body was swaying, though his nosebleed had finally stopped. Being able to stand obviously didn't make him a reliable fighting force in any sense of the word.

But, seeing that his will to fight hadn't diminished, Garfiel let out an irritated snort.

Garfiel: "Ya fuckin'... I thought our last bout would'a taught ya pretty good that y'got no chance against me. Y'used up yer trump card, and don't y'see me still pr'tty lively? Y'should know when t'give up. It ain't manly bein' a sore loser, oy."

Otto: "Too bad, I don't recall ever abandoning my grimy nature to become some clean-faced kid who'd surrender without a fight. Even if I lose my last cent, as long as I still have my body, I'll keep going. Or at least, that's what I imagine a friend of mine would say, right before he starts charging."

Garfiel: "...Again with that bastard?"

Garfiel clicked his tongue as Otto uttered the word "friend".

Garfiel: "How can y'put so much trust in that sweet-talkin' asshole? He's powerless. He's weak. He knows how t'work his tongue, and that's it. How's a man like that worth helpin', hah!?"

Otto: "Worth it? You'd have to wonder. I wouldn't really say that the present Natsuki-san is worth it."

Garfiel: "...Huh?"

Otto: "But the future, that's a different story."

Garfiel tilted his head at the unexpected answer, while Otto's grin deepened.

He had exhausted his stamina and spent all his tricks, but even now, without the faintest hope remaining, there was not a speck of unease in Otto's eyes,

Otto: "It's because I'm a merchant. I don't think it's such a bad deal to invest in someone who could greatly benefit me in the future. You see, Natsuki-san is... someone who, just maybe, might end up doing something huge."

Garfiel: "-----"

Otto: "But that's assuming he doesn't get snuffed out here. So, just what would this sprouting Natsuki-san eventually bloom into, and what kind of a price would it fetch...? I'll have to keep picking off the bugs and pruning the leaves to find out."

"Such a pain in the ass", Otto thought, as he scratched his head with a wry smile. Listening on the side, Ram expelled a bored sigh.

Ram: "Honestly, I don't know if anything about Barusu merits that impression. Barusu is weak, useless, and can't even brew a proper cup of tea or do a single thing right. I agree with Garf there."

Otto: "That's... actually that's a pretty balanced assessment."

Ram: "But, Barusu is a man with strangely good timing when it matters."

Ram asserted, paying no mind to Otto's timid attempt to support Subaru.

Seeing the two men tilt their heads at the word "timing", Ram nodded.

Ram: "Timing. A man with only good timing, that's what Barusu is."

He's a man who's often useless, who makes you wonder what role could he possibly serve, but this man named Natsuki Subaru has the mysterious tendency to always be there just when you need him.

When Emilia got away from Ram in the Capital, Subaru protected her in Ram's place.

When he was brought to the mansion wounded, within days, the Witchbeasts' upheaval followed. And again, it ended with Subaru saving the village's children after playing his part in eradicating the Witchbeasts. He was never the greatest contributor, but his presence certainly helped.

When Emilia returned from the Capital and ominous forces began closing in on the lands around the village, Subaru came with reinforcements and beautifully saved them from danger.

This man named Natsuki Subaru is a man with absurdly good timing.

There is not a single attractive thing about him, nor does he exude the slightest masculine charm. Ram had nothing positive to say about him, and at times she even felt sorry for him, though she couldn't remember why she felt this way, or what it was that was tugging at her.

Regardless, Natsuki Subaru was just that kind of man. And that was why this time, Ram—

Ram: "It's safe to trust in Barusu's timing— Once Barusu thinks he sees a chance and acts on that belief, then that must be the only way to seize victory."

Otto: "Sounds like you put a lot of faith in Natsuki-san, Ram-san."

Ram: "It's Ram-sama."

Otto: "Is this really the time to be bringing that up!?"

Displeased by the scoffing man beside her, Ram shot him a silencing glare.

They both placed their faith in Subaru's intentions. And they both agreed to fight at each other's side, and to say nothing about this to Subaru. They were aware that they had already bought more than enough time, but—

Otto: "It's strange, but somehow I still wanna keep going."

Ram: "That's because the fact that he hasn't gone down after those traps and that beautiful surprise attack is just insulting. Such impudence is unseemly, Garf— We ought to make you remember that."

Otto: “Woah, that was scary. This big sis is super scary. I’m actually starting to wonder if Natsuki-san lied about that sleeping girl being a gentle person...”

Otto muttered his irrelevant observation.

Ram confirmed the grip of the wand in her hand, and concentrated Mana at its tip once more.

Facing the two readying for battle, Garfiel kept his silence. He listened to their voices with his head downcast before finally, he took a sluggish step forward.

Garfiel: “———”

Sensing that battle would begin again, Otto and Ram’s bodies tensed. But, in the face of their resolve,

Garfiel: “——Enough, already.”

Came a scraping whisper.

Causing Otto and Ram to simultaneously furrow their brows.

Garfiel: “Thinkin’, is too much of a fuckin’ pain——”

Muttered Garfiel in an exhausted voice. And then,

???: “—————WRRRR!!”

A bestial roar echoed out, shaking the forests of the Sanctuary.

Every creature in the forests trembled and bowed their heads before its dominance.

——The great beast hath come.

Arc 4 Chapter 109 - Misstep

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 13, Chapter 4 “Lies, Liars, and Con Artists”, Part 9, and
Volume 13, Chapter 5 “Otto Suwen”, Part 4 (until halfway)

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#)

Otto: “Just like we discussed, the villagers will evacuate while I distract Garfiel. Natsuki-san said not to worry too much about buying time, but I’m feeling a bit greedier than that... So, can I count on your help?”

After parting with Subaru, and before setting out with the two bait carriages, Otto spoke with Ram in a corner of the village. Ram crossed her arms at Otto’s rather unconfident query, then leaned into a wall and closed her eyes. Met with her silence, Otto tried to suppress his impatient agitation at the urgency of the imminent battle.

Otto: “Uhm, sorry, but... we really don’t have much time...”

Ram: “Impatient men are repulsive. As I said before, it would depend on the conditions.”

Opening a single eye, Ram promptly rebuffed Otto’s imploring gaze.

This “before” she mentioned was referring to three days ago—the night Subaru challenged Roswaal to a bet, and Otto asked Ram to fight alongside him.

Roswaal had asked Ram to leave the room so he and Subaru could be alone.

And as Ram came out of the building, Otto was waiting for her outside. He had accurately predicted that Roswaal would ask her to leave before discussing the crucial matters of the Gospel, and so he managed to catch her in a moment when she was free.

Simply put, three days ago, Ram and Otto had been no more than shallow acquaintances.

They could count their interactions on the fingers of a single hand, and Ram did not possess a shred of interest in any man except for Roswaal. Other than the familiar faces from Roswaal's mansion, Ryuzu and Garfiel were probably the only people she talked to in the Sanctuary.

And so, when Otto called out to Ram, and she looked at him as if she was looking at a pebble on the side of the road, he had to start by building their cordial relations from scratch.

Otto: "Greetings, uhm... Ram-san. It sure is a nice night out."

Ram: "——"

Otto: "Hello?"

Ram: "—Ah, I was wondering who you were. So you are that lackey who follows Barusu around everywhere. I wasn't used to seeing you without him, so I had some trouble identifying what creature you were."

Otto: "So I'm even less than human!? The fact that you have that impression seriously hurts! Although, well, I can kind of understand why I'd be treated like Natsuki-san's accessory..."

Ram: "A man who accepts being anyone's accessory is worthless. Begone."

Otto: "So harsh!?"

Ram's unapproachable attitude swiftly tore Otto's friendly overture to pieces. Without showing the slightest interest in Otto, Ram leaned against the side of the door and crossed her arms.

Otto: "So, uh... Do you have a minute to talk?"

Ram: "Regardless whether I'll remember it, but haven't you even considered starting a conversation by presenting your name? Regardless whether I'll remember it."

Otto: “Why’d you remind me twice that you might not remember it? Haaaa... my name is Otto Suwen. I’m just a humble travelling merchant, but I’d appreciate it if you could memorize my face and name.”

Ram: “That would depend on how interesting this talk is.”

Otto despondently gave his name, while Ram refused to concede any of her domineering attitude.

Although she indicated that she was willing to listen, she would immediately put a stop to it should it turn out to be pointless. Otto pumped himself up once more and decided to broach it from a different angle.

Otto: “This would be related to what Natsuki-san and the Margrave are currently discussing, but... Ram-san. Would you be interested in helping Natsuki-san and myself release the Sanctuary from its barrier?”

Ram: “—That’s enough. Ram’s only desire is to fulfill Roswaal-sama’s most earnest wish. For as long as I respect Roswaal-sama’s will, liberating the Sanctuary that way would be pointless.”

Otto: “But that’s assuming everything proceeds as the Margrave intended... correct? Ram-san, are you aware that events have already diverged from that path?”

Ram: “———”

It was Otto who proposed, at the end of his conversation with Subaru, that they drag Ram in as an ally. Subaru was overwhelmingly reluctant about it, but going from what he said, Otto judged that it was a bet with good chances of victory.

Opening her eyes, Ram’s emotionless, pink irises fell on Otto. She uncrossed her arms, as the fingers of her lowered right hand grazed against what must’ve been her wand beneath her skirt.

How he chooses his next words would decide whether he incurs her wrath in the form of her wind blades.

Holding his breath and wetting his lips with his tongue, Otto showed the same fearless smile as he would when making a challenging business deal.

The stiffness of his body disappeared as his accelerated pulse fell to a more comfortable pace.

Now, just as always, it was time to stand firm.

Otto: “Events have diverged from the Margrave’s plans— and for the first time, you have a chance to realize your true wish. And I believe Natsuki-san and I can help you with that.”

Ram’s fingers wavered, hesitating— and then left her wand. Seeing this, Otto determined that his sales pitch was nothing to be scoffed at.

After she had heard Otto’s proposal and learned the details of his plan, Ram presented several conditions.

Honestly, revealing their entire plan to Ram was a rather huge gamble for Otto and Subaru. If they misjudged their proposal’s impact on Ram’s heart, then all their plans would be leaked to Roswaal. But there was enough value in getting Ram on their side to take this risk.

Ram laid out several conditions in exchange for her cooperation, and finding them entirely reasonable, Otto accepted.

He did not mention the details of her terms to Subaru. Because he needed her maximum cooperation, and because it was necessary to keep secret some of the actions he had to take. If Otto had told him, Subaru would have stopped them. If Subaru gave in to his emotions and ruled out this plan, it would’ve meant leaving the rest of their fate to chance.

Ram: “You have an unfortunate personality, you know that? I have no idea what you do for a living, but you’d make a terrible merchant.”

Otto: “You totally remember I was a travelling merchant, right!?”

Ram remarked with a snort at Otto’s secret determination, as a pained wail echoed throughout the Sanctuary.

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—Faced with the pressure of the beast’s overwhelming aura, Otto was surprised that his body was not trembling.

The abhorrent figure looming before him was a colossal monster four meters in length. Crooked, razor fangs extended like sabers from its enormous mouth, as its claws curved in brutal crescents, shaped like

life-reaping scythes. Every strand of golden fur coating its body was a wire thick enough to tangle any mortal blade that struck it.

Only the glint in its eyes, golden as its fur, retained vestiges of what it was before its transformation. But the lack of common points between now and what was there only moments before made it seem wholly unreal.

It was Garfiel, after he'd shed his human body for the form of a ferocious tiger.

Vile smelling breaths escaped his throat in growls, exuding a pressure enough to freeze the hearts of every creature in the forest.

Otto: "——"

Consciously forcing his lips to smile, Otto wished he could say something, anything, to lighten the mood.

But no voice escaped his frozen throat, and even his supposedly smiling cheeks ignored him and remained rigid. And, belatedly, Otto realized why he wasn't trembling.

—It was not because he was unafraid. Rather, it was because, in the face of certain death, Otto's body had given up on improving his chance of survival.

After all, trembling in the face of fear is the body's mechanism to ignite its instinct to survive.

It is the soul screaming "Do not give up!" towards the body— but, in a situation where this would be entirely pointless, it was only natural that his body wouldn't tremble.

He had heard about it. And he had imagined it.

He knew that Garfiel possessed both beastman and human blood alike, and that he could transform into a monster.

But reality surpassed Otto's flimsy imagination and manifested a creature so far beyond human understanding, it devoured his spirit to its core.

To think that, in the presence of such a creature, he could have uttered something so foolish as “We bought enough time, but why don’t we try and beat him?”. Of course he shouldn’t try to beat him. As if he stood a chance. And yet,

Ram: “Garf transformed... We’ve met all the conditions now.”

Muttered the small girl beside him, her voice entirely unchanged in the face of the overwhelming presence before her.

He hadn’t even the mind to ask, “What conditions?”. But, with a movement so mechanical that his neck creaked as it turned, Otto looked to the girl— to Ram.

Ram’s lips relaxed slightly, and, for the first time, she showed Otto something like a smile.

Ram: “Garf made a mistake by picking this obvious choice— We’ve won this fight.”

Otto: “———”

“You damn sure about that?”, Otto quipped in his mind, forgetting his usual politeness.

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—Ram gave Otto roughly three conditions for her cooperation.

Ram: “Regardless of the divergence from Roswaal-sama’s plans... and from the Gospel’s writ, you must preserve Roswaal-sama’s will to live in this world, whatever it takes.”

This term was already fulfilled when Subaru challenged Roswaal to their bet. Roswaal, who had been ready to abandon everything, again donned his war-paint and, with eyes brimming with life, resolved to take on the world once more.

Ram: “Secondly, Emilia-sama must not lose her determination to challenge the Trials. If this world is to continue despite diverging from Roswaal-sama’s plans, then she will inevitably have to stand for herself... She must be tested before the day of reckoning comes.”

This one would have to be left entirely to Subaru and Emilia, but judging from the fact Ram was willing to hear his proposal, she probably considered this condition as good as cleared.

When Otto heard Emilia had gone missing, his initial thought was “we are completely doomed”, but Ram did not seem to think so. However, since Otto was afraid she might change her mind if he asked her why, he decided to leave well enough alone.

Ram: “If you can guarantee these two things, I will be willing to help you... But regarding the part that will be kept secret from Barusu, I still have a few finer requirements.”

Otto: “Let’s hear it, as long as it’s something I can do.”

Ram: “If I am to join the fight against Garf, you’ll have to at least broaden the prospects of victory. First, you must disable Garf’s nose. Then, deal a certain amount of damage to make him lose his composure. I will not enter the fight until the decisive moment, so you’ll have to accomplish these things yourself. Surely, seeing you’ve gone out of your way to propose this plan, you must have at least one trump card hidden up your sleeve?”

Otto: “Well... There is a little something, yeah.”

Ram: “I see, just as I thought. In that case, here’s the last condition...”

Otto: “Right.”

Ram: “Make Garf transform— This is the final requirement for attaining victory.”

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Ram: “His sense of smell, is it still disabled?”

Otto: “...”

Ram: “Pathetic.”

Otto: “Guehuh!”

Seeing Otto so stricken that he couldn't even answer her question, Ram mercilessly jabbed her elbow into the side of his waist. Wailing at the sharp, gouging pain, Otto gasped as he suddenly remembered to start breathing.

Otto: "Ah, aaaargh... I—I thought I was gonna die... Just now, I thought I was gonna die from that pressure!"

Ram: "Even a soft and flimsy meat shield is better than nothing, so snap out of it. His sense of smell, is it disabled?"

Otto: "I'll pretend I didn't hear that first part, but, yeah, it is. Makoil pollen is an extremely powerful animal repellent, even humans pass out if they smell it from up close."

Ram: "And even more so for Garfiel, with his nose that is many times more sensitive. Then that's one of the benefits of his beast-form nullified. The timing and the damage dealt to him before his transformation... is all going according to plan."

Exhaling a light breath, Ram tipped her heels off the ground as she shifted onto her toes. From there, she dropped her heels, lifted them, and began repeating that motion in a simple leg exercise.

Otto furrowed his brows at Ram's strange behavior, and with "U—uhm?", he tilted his head.

Otto: "R—Ram-san? What are you doing?"

Ram: "I'm warming up. Slightly loosening my body before I start. As much I loathe to admit it, Barusu is right about this being efficient."

Otto: "Uhm, no, that's not... I meant, what are you doing these exercises for?"

Ram: "That's simple."

Casting the stuttering Otto a glance from the corner of her vision, Ram finished her warm-up exercise and closed her eyes. Then, opening her eyes again, her feet carried her forward— With a casual gait, as if she were taking a leisurely stroll, she began closing distance with the beast.

Otto: "W—wait!?"

Ram: “Be silent.”

Otto’s eyes bulged as he watched her bold advance. But Ram rejected his call, not slowing her speed in the slightest as she headed towards the tiger.

The beast stooped low as it glowered at the prey before its eyes. Surprised by the little creature’s action, its body stiffened for a moment, but immediately, it judged the behavior to be an insult to itself. Rage arose in its golden eyes as it raised its hefty fore paw, thicker than Ram’s torso, and swiped with vicious claws outstretched. A single strike from these claws, each as wide as the delicate girl’s arms, would carry enough force to instantly transfigure her limbs into shreds of gore with a graze.

The wind screamed as the reaper’s scythe swung to claim Ram’s life from this world, under the guise of claws.

—But, just before that could happen,

Ram: “You are too soft, Garf— Who do you think you are facing?”

Crouching down and letting the mighty claws pass overhead, Ram said to the tiger with pity.

Having thrown its entire body behind that swing, the tiger floundered as Ram’s tiny figure dived for its chest. Bending her knees, Ram sprung out her body as she shot out her readied fist—

Ram: “When have you ever won in a fist-fight against me?”

Garfiel: “———WRR!”

The fist lunging into its torso from below sent the several-hundred-kilogram beast into the air. Its body arching from the force of the strike, a pained wail spilled from the beast’s gaping maw. Shock waves crashed against the forest as Otto heard the sound of the air bursting.

Otto: “No, way.”

A girl a head shorter than he was had just punched a beast so tall that looking up wasn’t enough to see the whole thing. And just like that, with her fist still buried in the tiger’s torso, Ram used her offhand to slap the animal around even further.

Blows alternated from one hand to the other, as they beat the enormous beast shrieking in retreat. With fangs bared, it lunged its great jaw at Ram, but the girl leaped, setting her foot upon the tiger's nose, and, with a forceful kick, she sent the beast's face slamming down to the ground.

Scraping against the earth, its roar cut off, the colossal beast writhed, frantically attempting to tear apart the limbs of the girl toying with him. But Ram danced through the air like leaves in the wind, mockingly evading the tiger's strikes, driving attack after piercing attack into the shallow points in its fur.

Her heel into its throat. Her hand into its flank. Her fist punching aside its paw, opening the way for a direct kick to the beast's unguarded face.

Witnessing her dominate the vicious tiger in close-quarter combat, a surreal sensation as if he were reading a picture-book gripped at Otto's heart.

What on earth was he watching?

Seeing Garfiel shed away his human form had stricken Otto with so much despair that his body gave up on living. And yet, what on earth was he watching here?

With every swing of the girl's arm, the beast's body bounced back from the force of the blow. This colossal monster, whose very roars could slaughter a living creature, was unable to land a single hit on her. Its furious paws blindly mowed through the trees, gouged into the earth, transforming the forest with chaotic violence, and yet the constantly changing landscape caused Ram no issue at all.

They could win, like this.

He felt stupid now for having doubted Ram's pre-battle remarks. Her statements about purposely getting Garfiel to transform now held definite credibility.

As a beast, the power of the transformed Garfiel is overwhelming, but its advantage lay in situations where he's fighting multiple opponents. His very mass is a weapon in itself, and even against single individuals, there was no reason he should lose.

But, when his opponent is someone with inhuman combat abilities, it's a different story. His cumbersome body becomes a target, his powerful, tree-felling claws are fraught with openings, and his devastating strength leaves him clumsy and unbalanced, unable to shift between attack and defense.

Calmly analyzing the situation would make all of this become clear.

However, this simple solution would only be valid if an overwhelming individual was present to carry it out.

A friendly wildcard who could counter a transformed Garfiel— securing this precious resource for their team was Otto's greatest contribution to this fight.

Otto: "We can... we can do it! At this rate, Garfiel can be...!"

Clenching his fists, Otto cheered as he saw the first hope of victory. As if propping up that hope, Ram's fist slammed into the side of the ferocious tiger's face, sending the creature skidding magnificently across the ground, scraping up plumes of dust. And—

Ram: "—Blugh."

Unable to suppress her groan, and with profuse blood streaming from her forehead, Ram's body swayed as if about to fall.

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With the streaming blood dyeing her vision in crimson, Ram's frantic steps barely managed to keep her body from collapsing.

Sharp, piercing pain flashed just above her brow— at the very center of her forehead. Clicking her tongue, she rued the throbbing ache emanating from the faint-white scar.

Behind her, Otto's broken voice shrieked. So annoying.

Ram didn't need anyone to tell her how much the situation had deteriorated. It wasn't as if any of Garfiel's attacks had hit her. Against those thoughtless, wide-open swings, it would actually be harder to try to get hit. Those screams are annoying. Wanna hit him.

Ram: "—Huuuuuuu."

Expelling a short breath, Ram's unsteady feet kicked off the ground.

Immediately, the tiger's claws gouged into the earth where she'd just been standing. Clods of dirt sprang up like a shotgun blast, mingling with vivid red droplets as Ram spun, dancing to evade.

She was clearly on borrowed time, but somehow, she could still move. Sighting an opening, she kicked the tiger's jaw from below, sending the beast wailing in pain as she followed with another kick from her other leg. She rode on the momentum to backflip out of harm's way, but the instant she landed, her stance immediately crumbled.

Ram: "—Ah."

Garfiel: "———WRR!"

Literally by a hair's breadth, Ram evaded the claws late enough for them to shear off a tuft of her hair, sending strands of pink dancing through the air. She had dodged that strike by pure coincidence. If her feet hadn't just happened to slip, Ram's head would have doubtlessly exploded like a red fruit.

Tasting the closeness of death, feeling something indescribable rushing up her spine, Ram's red lips opened into a grin as she snarled.

The exhilaration of battle. The scar on her forehead throbbed, sending something between pain and an itch flooding down her entire body.

Her broken horn. Her proof of being an Oni. To release her full potential, Ram needed her horn to draw Mana from the inexhaustible supply within the atmosphere around her. After losing that organ, her body could not unleash even a tenth of its true power.

She knew beforehand that she'd be punished for overtaxing her body like this. Still, she had thought that if the conditions were right and she managed to end the fight quickly, there was no reason she'd lose. And yet—

Ram: “—You've gotten stronger, Garf.”

Ram's murmur was overflowing with an emotion she rarely showed to others.

Naturally, Otto had never seen it, and even Subaru only saw it on a few occasions. It was the kind of emotion she'd show to her only family, the one who had vanished from her memory.

With the tender smile still etched upon her lips, her lunging fist mercilessly smashed into the tiger's face.

She felt its tough skin bouncing off her knuckles. Her fist, having lost its firmness, directly felt the recoil of the impact, breaking the bones in her hand. It felt good. She was fighting. She was living. The exhilaration of killing and being killed flooded her with overwhelming euphoria. More, more. There's more after this. There is yet another dimension to reach.

Her right hand shattered, no longer capable of forming a fist. The tiger with its crushed face bellowed. Breath like a windstorm pressed towards her as her left hand sliced through the wind and gouged into the thin hide on the tiger's neck. Blood spouted, and her fingers tore out chunks of flesh as more blood spouted forth. Gory specks sprayed onto her white cheeks as she savored the intoxicating taste of iron on her tongue.

If her shattered right hand was useless, then she'll choke him with her arms. One arm wasn't nearly enough to wrap around the neck far wider than her own body. Soaring, grappling, throwing in her legs as well to strangle the beast's arteries, she dodged the claws closing in to swipe her away. Shifting with all her weight, one of her fingers snapped. The shriek felt good, like she was back home.

Ram: “Buh, puh, agh.”

The dance was so much fun, yet the haziness of her head was too aggravating. The blood streaming from her forehead showed no signs of stopping, and it began to overflow from her nose and mouth as well.

She was past her limit, and her body was beginning to break. Her nerves were controlling her body based on its full potential, but with no Mana to sustain it, her body was gradually failing to keep up. Ram continued to move at blazing speeds, still evading Garfiel's claws. So overwhelming was her combat ability, not even a single strike could graze her. But the wicked hands of collapse continued gorging upon her body, and the end would come before any claws or fangs could reach her.

Ram: "—Guh, phh."

After pausing for a deep breath, overflowing liquid burst from her mouth. Clots of blood splashed to the ground, and, as if it'd been Ram's very life force, her body instantly lost its strength.

Her shoulders slumped, her legs collapsed. The beast would surely not overlook this moment. Its beaten and enraged visage bared its fangs as it swung its paw towards Ram's slender body. But—

Otto: "Uwaaaah! DONA!!"

Alongside that throat-tearing chant, a wall of earth shot up from the ground. It cut into the space between Ram and the tiger's paw, dulling the attack's force for just an instant before immediately being smashed to dust.

But in that single instant, a hand dragged Ram's body back and, with all its strength, flung her backwards.

—Somehow, she had a feeling that this was the second time she'd been thrown like this.

Soaring through the air, she stared at the sky in a daze as that out-of-place sentiment popped into her mind. The impact of crashing back-first into the ground robbed her of her breath, but she swiftly raised her head to register the situation.

There, in front of her, in the spot where she'd just been tossed from, now stood Otto who should've been cowering on the side. It seems he saw that Ram was in danger and threw himself in. But even so, surely, there is nothing he can do—

Garfiel: "———WRRRR!"

The beast, enraged by this powerless creature who had intruded into its battle with Ram, blasted the pale-faced youth with a forest-shaking roar. If he froze here, he would surely become food for those

fangs. At this juncture demanding immediate action, Otto clenched his hands into fists, stomped his foot into the ground, and—

Otto: “———WRRRR!”

——From his slender throat came a roar exactly like the beast’s.

This was the Divine Protection of the Soul of Language, which Ram had heard so much about. Otto had always boasted that as long as it was an intelligent life form, whether it be dragon, critter, or even insect, he could speak with it. It seems to also allow him to communicate with Garfiel who’d transformed into this irrational beast.

Ram couldn’t tell what Otto must’ve heard from Garfiel’s roar.

And she couldn’t tell what Garfiel thought of Otto’s reply.

But this exchange of roars did create a brief delay before the beast resorted to its claws and fangs. That opening was more than enough for Ram to understand Otto’s true reason for throwing her.

Garfiel: “———WRRRR!”

Otto: “——WRRRR! Aaakh! That’s, my throat’s limit...!”

Struggling to sustain the literally blood-spewing shriek, Otto held his throat as he coughed.

With the conversation at an end, the tiger lifted its paw, aiming to annihilate Otto with a single strike. Otto raised his hands before him, and with a determined expression, he unleashed a desperate scream.

Otto: “EL DONAAA!!”

A thick wall of earth spread out in front of Otto, and, without waiting to watch it rise, he turned and began sprinting backwards. The tiger’s paw crashed through the wall behind him, sweeping up a whirling plume of dust as it closed in on Otto’s fleeing figure—— A direct hit knocked the thin body, flying like a dead twig, plunging nonstop through the bushes and trees.

Whether he lived or died would depend entirely on Otto’s endurance.

Ram paid no attention to the results of his decision and actions. She determined that to pay it no heed was the most appropriate way to repay Otto for what he had done.

Ram: “Garf— Transforming was a mistake after all.”

Ram announced to the tiger who was turning to attack her next.

Leaning against a tree, freed from the exhilaration of bloodlust, Ram’s head steadily cleared. Gripping her wand in her barely-operational left hand, she aimed its tip at Garfiel.

Mana began to shift.

Ram: “If you had even a speck of sense left, you wouldn’t have overlooked me.”

Garfiel: “———”

The tiger warily scrunched its nose.

But did nothing further. It had no idea what was coming.

The eyes of that senseless beast did not understand what it meant that Ram was standing in a mass of white light.

To the residents of this forest, this man, who transformed into a monster and ravaged the earth, the trees, and the forest in its attempts to strike Ram, was a violent and irredeemable villain—

Ram: “I’m not bungling this the way he did.”

Garfiel: “———!”

Realizing something, the tiger stooped low and charged towards Ram.

But it was too late.

Ram: “—AL FULA!”

Mana from the rage of the forest’s residents converged at the tip of Ram’s wand, exploding into a burst of light.

—Thus, the curtain was drawn on the battle taking place in the forest of Sanctuary.

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Getting the feeling that he'd just heard a beast's roar, Subaru stopped and glanced behind him.

Subaru: "Nah, no way."

It's way too early for that, Subaru naively decided.

It had been perhaps twenty minutes since he asked Otto to buy time and left him. It was doubtful whether Otto had even departed with the carriages yet, and there was no way the situation could've progressed that far.

He figured his anxiety must be making him hallucinate, but that was actually the most terrifying thought. Just how anxious was he, subconsciously?

Subaru: "Gotta believe, gotta believe. Otto's doing his best to buy time. He did say he'll spill everything once Garfiel catches him... We didn't tell the Arlam villagers anything they didn't need to know either, so they shouldn't become targets."

Each time Garfiel attacked Subaru or the villagers as they tried to leave, Subaru had confronted Garfiel about the Ryuzu clones beforehand. Which meant, by Subaru's speculation, that Garfiel didn't want the truth about the Ryuzu replicants to be leaked outside.

Subaru didn't know what the underlying reason for this would be, but it seems Garfiel could not be at ease until he had eradicated everyone who knew that fact. The loop in which he had slaughtered all the villagers except Subaru was probably the result of his inability to determine whether Subaru had divulged it to any of his fellow escapees.

Whether Garfiel would believe him when he says he never told them would be yet another gamble, but somehow, Subaru had a mysterious conviction that if he sincerely emphasized that fact, Garfiel would accept it.

Garfiel doesn't seem to be the type who could handle complicated concepts very well, so Subaru figured he would just have to present him with something he wouldn't need to think too hard about.

Subaru: "And if Otto's right, then we've got Ram on our side. Worst case, as long as he's not cornered, he shouldn't lay his hands on her..."

If there was anything to worry about, it's that Ram would provoke Garfiel more than necessary. The two have known each other for a long time, and they share a past of which Subaru knew nothing about. If something fractures between them because of that shared past, it could lead to unimaginable consequences.

But the reason Ram had agreed to help them was so Roswaal would keep living in a world that had diverged from his Gospel, and she would tirelessly work to forge that path. Or at least, that was how Subaru interpreted it, and he figured she needed his and Otto's help to achieve it.

Even were she not to be impressed by Otto's sales pitch, she would surely go along with it.

Subaru: "I believe in you, nee-sama! No matter how useless Otto is, please work with him!"

Clapping his palms together, Subaru prayed his utmost for their safety. Unaware that the two had gone off and made a decision to skirt the boundaries of life and death, Subaru concluded his prayer, and,

Subaru: "Well then, time for me to do my part."

Tugging his own cheeks to psych himself up, Subaru gave his head a shake and resumed his stride. The moment his foot stepped inside the gaping entrance, the unpleasant feeling of free-falling through the air and his guts floating upwards assaulted him.

Subaru: "Ugh..."

Holding his hand to his mouth, Subaru forced back the surging nausea as he pressed onward.

That unshakable floating sensation made every step he took feel like the phantom step at the end of a staircase. His organs churned as his blood seemed to flow backwards, and it was as if the air was slathering its tongue around his eyeballs.

Savoring the sense of rejection as if the entire world was refusing Natsuki Subaru, he drew deep breath after deep breath, his face pale, pressing his hands to the wall as he dragged his feet forward.

Subaru: “Don’t... be so cold... I’ll... feel hurt, you know...”

Having anticipated this, Subaru had emptied his stomach beforehand. Nevertheless, this gut-wrenching nausea caused stomach acid to surge to his mouth. Subaru pushed the feeling down and forced his eyes to open, as he desperately crept step after step through the darkness. And—

Subaru: “Ah, thank goodness— I’ve finally found you.”

Having proceeded entirely down the short distance of what felt like an endless path, Subaru's shoulders slump in relief.

In front of him, leaning against the ancient wall of the dusty corridor, the girl sitting there hugging her knees looked up at him with an astonished expression.

???: “Su... baru?”

Albeit her voice was faltering the fact she called his name filled him with satisfaction. Then, Subaru bent down beside the girl on the ground—

Subaru: “Well now— Let’s talk, Emilia-tan.”

Using the same icebreaker from back then when he couldn’t bear to face his mistakes, this time, it was Subaru who spoke the words.

Arc 4 Chapter 110 - Reason to Believe

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 13, Chapter 6 “The Reason I Trust You”

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — [Complete](#)

When he saw Emilia huddled up, hugging her knees, Subaru was washed over by an inopportune sense of relief.

Part of it was because he found Emilia, and part of it was because he found her here. He was convinced this was the only place she could be, and he had hoped this was where she'd be. Being right on both accounts, he felt a weight fall in the pit of his stomach.

Subaru: “Actually, come to think of it, Emilia-tan.”

Emilia: “...”

Subaru: “This really is a nice place to hole up if you don't want anyone to find you. There's only so many people who can get in here, and all the people who can get in wouldn't want to, anyway.”

Besides Emilia, only three other people could enter Echidna's Tomb.

One rejected the Trials and despised the Tomb, one witnessed another's past and chose to entrust the Sanctuary's future to someone else, whereas the last one roused the Witch's ire halfway through his Trial and had his qualification revoked.

All other qualified people were barred by severe restrictions not to enter. So indeed, this hiding place had “Emilia Only” written all over it.

Emilia did not reply to Subaru's honest praise. She only remained curled up, silently looking up at Subaru.

Subaru: “—Mind if I sit beside you? Standing is... honestly pretty exhausting.”

Emilia: "..."

Subaru: "Where I come from, silence means yes. So, 'scuse me."

Bathed in Emilia's focused stare, Subaru magnificently proclaimed this and sat down at her side.

Two fists was the closest distance as Subaru's manly courage could muster. Before he could get any closer, he'd have to use his words and appeals to shorten the emotional distance between them.

Because, right now, the distance separating their hearts was likely far greater than the widths of their fists.

Subaru: "-----"

Emilia: "-----"

Sitting next to each other, a brief silence fell between them.

Subaru patiently waited for Emilia to speak, while Emilia watched him as he waited. Her lips quivered several times, until finally, with some hesitation,

Emilia: "Subaru..."

Subaru: "-----"

Emilia: "How... are you here?"

Subaru: "How, huh... That's a tricky one. Since you are always on my mind, Emilia-tan, I managed to find you in no time, I guess."

He was rather proud of that fact. Since it meant that he was the only one, at least in the Sanctuary, who knew Emilia well enough to accurately divine her feelings.

Although, if he were truly attuned to Emilia's feelings, he wouldn't be speaking to her inside the Tomb right now.

At Subaru's answer, Emilia's eyes widened. But then, she shook her head as if that wasn't the answer she was looking for.

Emilia: “No. That’s not it, Subaru. I wasn’t asking how you got here... I meant... I thought only people who were granted the qualification could enter the Tomb.”

Subaru: “You sure you didn’t forget, Emilia-tan? The first day we got here, when you fainted inside, I rushed straight in here to bring you out. Apparently, if the Witch hates me like she hates Roswaal, I would’ve exploded the instant I walked in. But, turns out it wasn’t that bad for me. Just feels floaty like I’m in an elevator that’s constantly a second before stopping. Nothing I can’t handle.”

Emilia: “...I, see.”

Emilia muttered with apparent disappointment, as this place wasn’t as exclusive as she thought. Then, she cast a worried gaze over Subaru, who seemed increasingly wracked by nausea.

Even though she must be desperately trying to put the mess inside her head in order, the fact she was still thinking of others even now was at once admirable, heartbreaking, and sweet.

Emilia: “So then... how did you know I was here?”

Rather than silence, Subaru seemed more at ease when distracted by conversation.

Perhaps having noticed this over the course of their exchange, when she saw him heaving with labored breaths, Emilia presented Subaru with a new question. Her words were laced with suspicion and resignation, intermixed with some complex, indecipherable emotion.

The resignation was cavalier, and the suspicion needlessly paranoid. Both traits which Emilia rarely ever showed— In fact, this might be the first time Subaru had ever seen them.

Emilia: “...Subaru?”

Subaru: “Aah, sorry, sorry. Let’s see, how did I know you were here, well, uh, pr—probably because there’s nothing about Emilia-tan that I don’t know, so...”

Emilia: “Liar.”

He wasn’t trying to joke around, but his frivolous answer was nevertheless promptly rejected.

Setting her chin on her knees, Emilia tilted her head as she looked at Subaru. The emotions fluttering within her amethyst eyes were of the pinnacle of chaotic turmoil, as if on the precipice of engulfing her.

Hating the fact that the look of her eyes betrayed her emotions, Emilia turned away, pouting, so that Subaru could no longer see them.

Emilia: “You won’t fool me even if you say that— When I don’t even properly know myself, how could you possibly know?”

Subaru: “It’s surprising how little people can see of themselves. Even when others around them can see all the way to their weak points.”

He wouldn’t call it personal experience, but it did seem to happen to him over and over.

Each time, he’d get all fired up, unaware of how thoughtless, reckless, and senseless he was being. And only when someone finally spells it out for him, would he start to notice it himself. Once, someone had pointed this out to Subaru, and for the very first time—

Subaru: “I figured you’d be here, Emilia-tan, half out of faith, and half out of hope.”

Emilia: “Half, and half...”

Subaru: “I looked all over the village but couldn’t find you anywhere. So instead of thinking about where you might have gone, I thought as hard as I could about why you left in the first place. And when I did, I figured you must be here. And when I found you, I was relieved like you wouldn’t believe.”

Emilia: “...You were relieved, that’s all?”

Subaru: “Huh?”

As Subaru relaxed his lips into a relieved smile, Emilia asked.

Her voice was quiet, almost inaudible. Subaru raised his brows when he heard this, while Emilia locked her gaze onto his as if to peer into the depths of his eyes.

Emilia: “When you found me here, you were just relieved...? You weren’t angry?”

Subaru: “What, Emilia-tan... No way, were you scared I’d be mad at you?”

Her timid attitude almost made Subaru burst out chuckling.

Running off without telling anyone where she was going, only to get scared of reprimands when she was found, that’s exactly what a child would do.

Although that attitude somewhat made sense now that he’s learned about her actual and mental age, it was still incredibly unlike her. But Subaru decided to pay the strangeness no heed and only shook his head.

Subaru: “I’m not angry at all. I was anxious, and honestly super panicked, but not mad. And considering I found you here, I’m really glad.”

Emilia: “...I see.”

The emotions Subaru felt for the missing Emilia was something other than anger.

And even if there was any anger, it’d be at himself for missing the warning signs and failing to anticipate Emilia’s actions. But that anxious, panicked feeling of all his plans coming to ruin was all drowned beneath the flood of relief when he found her.

And so, Emilia’s worries were needless. At least, that’s what he was trying to tell her.

Emilia: “You are not... angry.”

That’s what he tried to tell her, yet her mutter was not one of relief.

Subaru: “—Emilia?”

Emilia: “You are not... angry at me— You won’t... even get angry at me.”

Her voice was quiet, hoarse, and trembling.

By the time Subaru furrowed his brows in astonishment, it was already too late.

Looking down, biting her lip, Emilia’s eyes opened wide.

Tears welled under her eyelids as she tried to keep them from spilling.

Emilia: “Why... won’t you be mad?”

Subaru: “Emili—”

Emilia: “I did something selfish... didn’t I? I did something that distressed you, didn’t I? I disappeared without saying a word, and I worried you, didn’t I? I made you anxious, wondering if I’d run away... That’s the sort of thing I did, wasn’t it? And when someone does that to you, shouldn’t you be angry? Or are not you that kind of person, Subaru?”

Drowning out Subaru’s voice, Emilia spouted her feelings like a torrent. Emphasizing the selfishness of her actions, she closed in on Subaru as if pressing him to condemn her.

Overwhelmed by her unrelenting pressure, Subaru finally realized that he had made a decisive error in choosing his words.

Emilia wasn’t scared that Subaru would be angry at her.

Emilia was scared that Subaru wouldn’t reproach her for her actions.

As to why—

Emilia: “Why aren’t you angry...? You are not angry... because you never expected anything from me in the first place, right? You saw how I failed, but you are still being kind to me... because you aren’t even disappointed in me, right? Because you never thought I could’ve done it... right?”

Subaru: “———”

Perhaps those were the fears that Emilia had always harbored, but was never able to voice, like a darkness wallowing in the depths of her heart.

How many times had she challenged the Trials, only to be sent back with her spirit broken?

She hated herself for it, and the others showed their disappointment at her failure, but there were also those among them who would never fault her, like Subaru and Puck.

While the presence of Subaru and Puck did relieve her, she also, always, had been fighting with this persistent anxiety.

Disappointment meant that there was expectation.

She hated herself because she was disgusted with how she couldn't put up a fight. But no matter how many times she repeatedly failed, she was kindly consoled regardless, and while that worked as a temporary reprieve, it exacerbated a larger, greater sense of anxiety.

For Emilia had always dreaded Subaru and Puck's kindness.

Subaru: "No, Emilia. That's not what I think..."

Belatedly realizing the height of the waves surging in Emilia's heart, Subaru spoke up.

If he does not capture Emilia right here, right now, something terrible is going to happen. Should she continue to reject him, then even if he reaches out, he will never seize her again.

And so, with no time to consider his words, he raised his voice,

Subaru: "I can't get mad at you, but it's not because of anything like that..."

Emilia: "If that's true, then...! Why! Why... didn't you keep your promise...?"

Subaru: "-----Hk!"

Having his knee-jerk reaction shot down, the change of topic caused Subaru's face to stiffen. The promise Emilia spoke of was the one he'd made to her the night before. And as for whether it was fulfilled—

Emilia: "I asked you to hold my hand until morning! And you promised me you would, Subaru... so why did you let go of my hand? Why didn't you keep your promise...?"

Subaru: "-----"

Emilia: "B—both you, and Puck, broke... your promises, and disappeared. You left me behind, and went away... You liars. Subaru you liar. Puck you liar... You liars, liars... liars..."

Her tearful voice lashed out, condemning their broken promises.

Her face downcast and tears streaming from her eyes, Emilia butted her head into Subaru's shoulder before weakly slapping her hand against his chest. The force was equivalent to nothing. But even so, it hurt as though he'd been punched clean through.

This was the accumulation of all the pain which Subaru had overlooked, which Emilia had endured.

And all the pain Subaru and Puck had so callously showered upon her.

Emilia: "P—promises are important... I told you that, I told you, didn't I!? That for Spiritual Arts Users, for me, promises are important... and so I wanted you to keep them... But when you are supposed to have just apologized to me for not having kept one... you broke, a promise again..."

Subaru: "...Emilia."

Emilia: "Never break promises... Never tell lies... You must keep your promises... Because if you don't... If I don't, then... Mother and Juice..."

With her face still pressed against Subaru's shoulder, Emilia's emotions wandered, aimless and lost. The upheavals of her emotions and the grief at his betrayal had torn her thoughts into a thousand disjointed shreds.

Her faltering words grew incoherent, until Emilia was sobbing like a bawling child.

Emilia: "Never tell lies... Never..."

Listening to her voice shaking with grief, Subaru felt a clawing pain tearing at the insides of his chest.

"Promise" was a word that carried different meanings for Subaru and Emilia. Once, Subaru had made light of their promise and wounded her and opened a mutual rift between them in the process. After their reunion, they reaffirmed the significance of promises, and sealed one in the form of a bond.

And regardless the word "Promise" again echoes without kindness, instead binding the two with overwhelming weight.

More than anything, whenever she talked about promises, Emilia would seem different than usual— as if something, some integral part of Emilia's being, tethered her to promises.

Emilia: “———”

With her head buried between her knees, Emilia was weeping. And every second Subaru spent watching her cut another gash of guilt into his heart. Her sobs echoed into his ears as he frantically considered what to say.

Should he apologize? Should he pretend to understand? Should he desperately try to console her? How much consideration is safe for him to convey?

Subaru’s head spun and spun as he thought, unable to grasp any hint of a solution.

What to do, what could he, what should he, what ought he, what would be the best course of action?

Subaru: “———”

Think, think, think, Subaru closed his eyes amidst his whirling thoughts, and then—

He felt he’d reached the answer on what to do.

Subaru: “Emilia— I love you.”

Emilia: “———”

Those words had no business being spoken in this situation.

Emilia: “...Huh?”

Hearing this, Emilia slipped an astonished groan and looked up. Her teary amethyst eyes opened wide as she caught Subaru in her gaze. Seeing his own twisted visage reflected on her teardrop— all he could do was steady himself to confront his own heart.

After all, he no longer had any doubt on what he wanted to say.

Subaru: “Night after night... you throw yourself at the same exact Trial over and over again. And what is this Trial, anyway? It’s just the goddamn past, isn’t it? Well quit dawdling around getting caught up on things that’ve already passed!”

Emilia: “...Ah, guh.”

Subaru: “And just when I figured I’d do it for you, you start saying it’s something you have to do yourself and got so goddamn stubborn about it. It’d be one thing if it helped you get past it, but if you are just getting the same results anyway, then it was all just talk, wasn’t it? How about taking a moment to consider what it feels like, having to watch you fall down over and over again?”

Emilia: “S—Subaru...”

Subaru: ““And to top it off when your pet-slash-guardian goes missing, you can’t even stand for yourself anymore? You throw a tantrum and cry your heart out, making everybody worried about you, then you shirk your responsibilities to go sulk in bed. Well how lovely for you, but enough’s enough, I’m sick of it!”

Emilia’s eyes bulged in disbelief as she listened to Subaru’s tirade. Her damp eyes forgot their tears thanks to the shock, while her lips weakly quivered, unable to pronounce any meaningful words.

Without a doubt, more than ever before, Emilia’s heart was being deeply wounded.

Faced with Natsuki Subaru’s scorn and contempt, never once directed at her before, her heart was torn to pieces.

Emilia’s face contorted.

This was not tearful grief, nor tantrum-inciting rage, nor the hollowness of resignation and defeat. Showered by abuses she’d never heard before, Emilia’s expression changed. Not to any of the more fitting emotions, but to something else entirely.

—On Emilia’s lips rose a horrifically dry smile.

Emilia: “That’s... right, isn’t it? O—of course... you’d, think this about me too, Subaru...”

Subaru: “———”

Emilia: “There’s no way to dress it up, is there... I’m awful. Ever since I came to the Sanctuary... No, even long before that... all I ever did was cause trouble... and so, I...”

Subaru: “Yeah. You honestly haven’t done a single good thing since you came to the Sanctuary. I know I’m not one to talk here, but this is just way too horrendous to ignore. There’s no getting around it.”

Subaru affirmed the trembling Emilia's self-negations.

Hearing this, Emilia's throat made a choked groan. Swallowing a sob, or something close to it, and with her pained smile still upon her face,

Emilia: "And that's why... both you, and Puck... ab—abandoned me, of course..."

Subaru: "Yes. You've pulled a lot of crap, and you are still showing no signs of getting better. Rather than wanting to do something about it at this point, the only natural conclusion is that you are hopeless no matter what."

Emilia tried to answer Subaru's rebukes. But Subaru snatched the tail of her reply and slammed her with this merciless critique.

Subaru: "—But."

Just before reaching the end, Subaru's denouncements ceased.

Emilia looked up at Subaru. Rising in her eyes was an emotion which only Subaru would understand.

—For it was the same emotion that Subaru had once felt himself.

Subaru: "I love you— Emilia."

Using the same words which he had been unable to escape from, Subaru blocked off Emilia's escape.

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The long lashes bordering her eyes trembled as Subaru's words robbed her of her consciousness.

Seeing her frozen there, with even her thoughts ground to a halt, Subaru's cheeks slightly softened. It was not relief, and certainly not ridicule. If one must give it a name, it would have to be nostalgia.

So nostalgic that he wanted to shout out everything inside him, alongside everything Emilia wanted to hear.

Subaru: “I love you. I love you, love you, love you, so much that I can’t help myself but love you.”

Emilia: “W—what are you... saying, all of a sudden...”

Subaru: “I love your super-pretty silver hair, I love your amethyst eyes and how they look like jewels when they are wet, I super-love your voice and how I get dreamy just from hearing it, and there’s your slender long legs and your fair-white skin, and our crazy-ideal height difference, and the fact that just being with you makes my heart race uncontrollably, and all of it makes me fall head-over-heels in love with you.”

Emilia: “———”

Subaru: “I love how you are just a little dopey, and it’s adorable how you put your best into everything, I admire how fervent you get for other people’s sakes, and the way you disregard yourself makes me feel like I just can’t leave you alone, and nothing would make me happier than to be able to watch all of your expressions and all of your emotions from here at your side... That’s what I’ve always felt.”

Emilia: “This isn’t the time to...! Stop messing with me!”

All his feelings for Emilia flowed from his mouth like a flood.

But Emilia shook Subaru’s words away with a shriek. Heaving her shoulders, her brows shot up, Emilia bared her fury at the back-peddalling Subaru, who was acting as though he hadn’t said any of those hurtful things to her.

Emilia: “Why are you saying this all of a sudden! This isn’t what we were talking about! S—Subaru... you just said that I’m utterly useless, that I’m completely lacking, that’s what you were saying! You are sick of it, you can’t bear watching anymore... y—you said, that, I...”

Subaru: “Yeah, I did. Was subject to seeing all that uselessness, and how the results are always something where you just want to sigh over how it was all insubstantial talk, considering how impatient I am in the first place, I should’ve stopped loving you a long time ago. And I would have, if it was anyone but you, Emilia.”

Emilia: “But why!!”

While acknowledging her worthless record, Subaru held off on the most important judgment.

Unable to accept this, unable to allow this omission, Emilia screamed.

Emilia: “All that uselessness and hopelessness, that’s who I am, isn’t it!? So why are you trying to overlook it? Why are you trying to forgive me? Why...”

Subaru: “If that’s what you are asking, then I’ve told you countless times already! IT’S BECAUSE I LOVE YOU!!!”

Emilia: “———Hk.”

Met with Emilia’s tearful protests, Subaru pushed his face into hers and shouted.

Overwhelmed by his advance, Emilia flinched back, but for each inch she retreated, Subaru closed the same distance. The fact that they were gazing into each other’s eyes, close enough for their breaths to intertwine, did not change.

Subaru: “I love you. So no matter how disappointing you are, I will think of it as discovering another side of you, even when you’re lacking, I will wind up supporting you thinking it’s a barrier for you to overcome, and no matter how fed up you are with yourself, I will never dislike you.”

Emilia: “———”

Subaru: “Even if you hate how weak and pathetic you are, and worry that everyone’ll give up on you... I am going to keep expecting things from you. I am never going to use your weakness as a reason to desert or to abandon you.”

Emilia’s eyes wavered. The gaze which she’d fixed upon Subaru—— was filled with a weakness that was yearning to receive his rebukes, to indulge in its own resignation, and to drown in a pool of her own sorrow and grief.

Emilia wanted to be condemned. Perhaps because it is only when everyone has given up on you, and when you recognize that you are entirely beyond saving, that, for the first time, you’d truly feel saved. Subaru knew that feeling, but he also knew what it was like to be guided out of it.

Because Natsuki Subaru had once tried to abandon himself as well, but nevertheless failed to make everyone else abandon him.

Subaru: “I’ve fallen madly in love with you. Everything good about you shines brilliantly for me. And of course, I know not everything about you is good. You are... You are not an angel, nor a goddess, but just an ordinary girl. Pain and hardship make you want to cry, and you want to avoid the things you don’t like, and, if possible, you’d much rather choose only the easy and enjoyable paths.”

Emilia: “———”

Subaru: “But despite those weak, or even ugly parts of you, I love the entire person that is Emilia. And so... even now, I’m not disappointed in you at all.”

Emilia: “...Th—that’s— Don’t you think that’s too selfish!?”

Subaru’s lips weaved his longing into words.

Listening to them in sequence, Emilia couldn’t suppress her turmoil as she objected.

Emilia: “You’ve just denounced me, and said time and time again that I’m useless, and now you are saying you love me anyway... How can you expect me to believe that! Subaru, why would you have that kind of faith in me...? It makes no sense at all!!”

Subaru: “Wrong! You got it all wrong! It’s not because I believe in you that I love you! —It’s because I love you that I believe in you! It’s that way around!”

Emilia: “Love isn’t a reason to believe in someone!”

Subaru: “——Guh! If love alone weren’t reason enough to believe, then who the hell would willingly go through all this suffering to help a pain in the ass woman like you!?”

Voices peaking, the two’s emotions crashed into each other.

Subaru pressed his hand to the wall and dragged himself up to stand while Emilia also stood up to face him. Close enough to butt heads, each with their brows raised, Subaru and Emilia barked out their emotions.

Sending spit flying, faces red, shouting “No you are wrong!”, were the two of them who’d never screamed at each other before.

Subaru: “I love you! I love you so much it drives me crazy, so much that I could die for you. That’s why I put up with all the pain and the suffering and why I’m standing in front of you now even though I’m close to puking!”

Emilia: “That’s— I never asked for that! Going off saying whatever selfish things you want... You are the one who’s never thought about my feelings, Subaru! Just like now... You are putting yourself in harm’s way and always getting hurt because of me... do you have any idea how that makes me feel!?”

Subaru: “Like I could have any goddamn clue, and I’m not going to think about it, either! Everything I ever think about is how to look cool in front of you! What will make you think the best of me, what will make you happy... I’m here working my ass off, how about going with the plan and giving me a cute look once in a while!”

Emilia: “Don’t treat me like I’m a doll! If all you want is for me to be happy... th—then, why did you break your promise! All you had to do was stay with me like I asked you to! So why didn’t you! I bet you actually hate me, don’t you!”

Subaru: “I love you!!”

Emilia: “You are lying!!”

Subaru spewed forth all his emotions in desperation, only for Emilia to yell over him.

How much of a detour had he once taken just to voice these very feelings? How many obstacles had Subaru had to overcome just for the sake of conveying those words to her?

These confessions of love, thrown around so much that they begin to feel cheap, were all Subaru’s truest sentiments, fused with the whole of his being, seeping through every portion of his soul.

Subaru: “I’m not lying! I love you! How about you talk, what do you think of me!? You’ve always got this attitude where you’re always making these goddamn insinuations! Do you have any fucking idea what a jolt it is to my heart every time you make these cute expressions and it looks like there’s hope!? Stop fucking around with me!”

Emilia: “I—I’m not messing with you! I’m just being normal, stop saying weird things! I have so many things to think about right now and I’m facing such serious problems, and you are asking me how I feel about you... I can’t think about those kinds of things! Stop it! Stop bullying me!”

Subaru: “Who’s bullying who here! It’s you! You are the one bullying me!”

Emilia: “It’s you! Bullying me! Subaru!”

Without a shred of logic, it was a clash of emotions. Like two children throwing tantrums showering insults at each other, Subaru and Emilia loudly asserted their respective feelings.

Their voices echoed through the dim, narrow Tomb, shattering the long silence that had existed since the Tomb’s construction. The intensity of their argument could practically slap the one resting inside this Tomb awake, the two of them raggedly panting as they guided their fruitless quarrel towards its conclusion.

Emilia: “I can’t trust anything you say anymore! You are a liar! You broke your promise, and then you just show up in front of me again like nothing happened... Y—you thought I wouldn’t notice, didn’t you! But I was watching! I was watching to see whether you’d keep your promise to me!”

Subaru: “Ain’t that the asshole thing to do!? Don’t you feel embarrassed pulling this crap, pretending to be weak so you can test people!”

Emilia: “I shouldn’t have to hear this from a promise-breaking liar!”

Subaru: “Me breaking my promise has nothing to do with this!”

Emilia’s cheeks blushed with fury as Subaru callously tried to sidestep the issue.

So overwhelmed by emotion that she couldn’t even speak, Emilia took several ragged breaths before finally wrenching out the words,

Emilia: “Why... Why did you break your promise?”

Subaru: “...I’m sorry I broke my promise, I am. I wanted to keep holding your hand and stay with you until morning, I really wanted to.”

Emilia: “That’s not what I asked— Why did you break your promise?”

Subaru: “...I can’t say it.”

Gritting his teeth, Subaru replied to Emilia’s question with an anguished groan.

Seeing him trying to dodge the question even now, Emilia expelled a long sigh.

Emilia: “You won’t keep your promises. And you won’t tell me why you broke them, either... And now you’re yelling at me to do something. If you’re going to tell me you love me... then act like it! Otherwise, I... can’t, believe you...”

Subaru: “Emilia.”

Emilia: “If you’d kept your promise and stayed with me until morning! Then I would’ve definitely believed you! I would’ve believed you and entrusted everything to you! But you broke your promise... And so I, can’t anymore... Whether it’s you or Puck, you both left me behind...”

Grimacing, Emilia stuck her fingers into her silver hair and lowered her face. The heat of her fervor shifted and changed directions as Emilia tightly grasped herself.

Emilia: “Now that Puck is gone, these scenes have been going through my head... They are in my head, scenes I’ve never seen before, conversations I don’t remember, they just keep flowing and flowing...”

Subaru: “———”

Emilia: “I thought I remembered everything, but these are memories I never knew existed... Yet, they really are my memories... And every time I remember, whenever something that’s meant to be there, something which I’ve forgotten re-emerges, I get so afraid...”

These memories Emilia spoke of— which Puck had sacrificed his bond with her to unseal, were all the genuine memories which she had once tried to forget.

When her Contract with Puck was terminated, the uncorked memories began to overflow, flooding Emilia’s interior with her true recollections.

But this dramatic shift could transform her very being.

Emilia: “I finally realized that I’ve been leaning on Puck while running away from all sorts of things... I’m certain that Puck left so he could tell me that. But I’m scared. I’m scared. Puck’s gone, and my real memories are coming out... And I... I feel like I’m steadily losing myself.”

Subaru: “———”

Emilia: “Once all the memories come back... I know I won’t be the same me anymore. My present self is built upon memories that aren’t my real memories... but, once I remember where I really started... I know that this me who’s come all this way is going to disappear...”

All of Emilia’s resolve and determination had false memories as their basis.

And so, once she regains her true memories, once her origin changes form, just what will happen to Emilia’s present resolve, and to the path she has walked thus far?

???: “—*What’s important isn’t the beginning or the middle, it’s the end.*”

Subaru: “———”

Suddenly, a voice echoed through Subaru’s mind. This familiar yet distant voice felt so incredibly close to Subaru, though it belonged to someone who he would likely never see again. At the very end of the end of their parting, she gave him these words as his homework.

“Ahh, that’s right”, he thought.

No matter how it began, regardless of which path you took, until you reach the end of the end of the end, who has the right to say whether it had all been a mistake or not?

Subaru: “No matter what you remember, nothing will change. I love you. And I’ll always love you.”

Emilia: “—Hk. I don’t, believe you. This me, you say you love... o—once she’s gone, will you, still...”

Subaru: “I’ll say this now. No matter what happens, you are not going anywhere. And I’ll continue to love you.”

Emilia: “...You are a liar. How do you, expect me to... believe you...”

Subaru: “—Then, I’ll make you believe.”

With her voice trembling and her eyes wavering, Emilia tried to reject Subaru.

His words could not reach her. And his appeals could not convince her. In that case, the only way left to convey his feelings was through action. And so,

Emilia: “Suba...”

Subaru: “If you don’t want it, dodge.”

Within breathing distance— or rather, so close that not even their breaths could stand between them—

Subaru reached for Emilia’s shoulder, and drew his face closer. Watching Subaru’s approach, confusion rose in Emilia’s eyes as her body tensed.

For one second, he waited. If she was going to push him away, this was the moment.

Emilia: “——”

But Emilia closed her eyes.

Whether it was resignation, or the result of hesitation, Subaru couldn’t tell.

Subaru: “—Mmh.”

Emilia: “——Ngh.”

Their breathing intertwined, Emilia held her breath, Subaru’s brows furrowed in pain.

A quiet noise came from the force of their teeth striking together. It started with that slight, aching pain, but it soon vanished from even the crevices of their minds, drowned out by the intensity of that heat.

Soft lips. A kiss, barely more than a touch.

For Emilia, it was her first, and for Subaru, it was his second time kissing her.



Illustration from Volume 13, coloring by Setowi ([source](#))

Unlike the first time, filled with the cold taste of death. This second kiss was of the burning taste of life.

With neither being the first to move, their lips parted. They drew their faces away from each other, both forgetting to breathe as they gazed at the other.

Flushed cheeks. Watery eyes. The person reflected within Emilia's irises looked utterly entranced.

That pathetic expression made Subaru return to his senses first, and, while finally remembering to breathe—

Subaru: “—I love you.”

Emilia: “———”

Subaru: “No matter what useless side of you I see, and no matter what kinds of fights we get into, I will never stop loving you, Emilia. That shall not change no matter what— So I'll always believe in you. And if you ask me why, it's...”

Emilia: “Because, you love me...”

Finishing the end of Subaru's sentence as if in a daze, Emilia touched her lips. Tracing her fingers over them, as if confirming the lingering tenderness of their touch, tears welled in her eyes.

A droplet travelled down her fair-white cheek, glimmering like a drop of the moon.

Subaru: “It's only natural that you'd be anxious when unknown memories start flowing back. And I understand being scared when it feels like you are becoming someone you don't know. But that doesn't mean the path you've walked will vanish, or that your feelings will change.”

Emilia: “How could you... say this like you are sure...?”

Subaru: “What's important isn't the beginning. It's the end— The woman I respect most in the world told me that.”

His mother may be the most air-headed person in the world, but somehow, she still managed to teach him his single most important lesson in that world.

Though he couldn't be sure if he understands it completely, he nevertheless intends to try. Because there is a girl right in front of him, with whom he wishes to figure this out together.

Watching Emilia stand there, weighed by anxiety, Subaru gave her a lighthearted shrug, as if to tell her that it's no big deal, and to blast her worries away.

Subaru: "It's alright, Emilia. No matter what you remember, I'll be on your side. Go ahead and recall every memory you've forgotten. And if you are still afraid, then go find it."

Emilia: "Find... Find what...?"

Subaru: "Just like how my feelings for you allow me to charge ahead without a fear in the world, you should find your most cherished feeling that'll let you sprint forward without worrying about anything going on around you."

Emilia never hesitated to expend herself for another's sake. The way she placed others before herself was noble and beautiful, and Subaru loved it to no end, but—

—The expression "for another's sake" is horrifically kind, and horrifically sad. Because the feelings one may hold towards an unknown stranger could surely never rival the feelings one held for someone familiar and close.

Subaru: "I'm kinda sorta hoping that cherished feeling would be directed towards me, though."

Emilia: "My... cherished feeling..."

Perhaps she was not listening to Subaru, for Emilia raised her hand to her chest and lowered her eyes. Her fingers reached for where Puck's crystal would have been.

With their bond shattered, there was nothing for her to touch. Her fingertips scraped at empty air. But Emilia clenched her hand firm.

Emilia: "Once I've recovered all of my memories... maybe it'll be there, my cherished feeling."

Subaru: "Yeah. It'll be there. Your reason to keep walking."

Emilia: "—Mhm."

Her expression was not exactly doubtful, nor was it entirely one of acceptance.

After seeing Emilia give a slight nod, Subaru closed his eyes as he turned his face up to the ceiling.

He gets the sense that the words which had similarly uplifted him had been more powerful. Gets the sense that it had been kinder words, stricter words, stronger words that saved him.

—But will he really become Emilia's strength?

Subaru: "——"

It'd be way too lame to ask that now.

He sighed, and the instant he let go of his strength, the nausea he'd forgotten about jolted him to his core. Instinctively putting his hand to the wall, he barely managed to keep himself from puking.

Emilia: "Subaru?"

Subaru: "It's nothing... Or really, as much as I wanna man up and say that, it's not nothing. I'm pretty bad right now. Anyway, if you wanna keep arguing or fighting, we could pick it up once we are outside."

Emilia: "Geez... That's not what I want at all."

In front of the pale-faced Subaru, Emilia's lips formed into a faint smile. But she was too weak to resume her usual determined facade. She hasn't yet reached a clear-cut answer. And her anxiety wasn't fully dispelled.

His hand against the wall, Subaru started walking towards the Tomb's exit. Behind Subaru's unsteady steps, Emilia reached out her hand, but hesitated, indecisive about whether to touch him. The meeting of their lips just now must've affected her considerably.

Just thinking back on it made Subaru's face flush red-hot at how brazen he had been.

But all those sentiments would have to be left behind for now.

Subaru: "——"

So he could show her he is on her side, and willing to do anything for her—

In order to fulfill the role that he had taken upon himself. To protect her, and to protect all his feelings for her—

Subaru: “I’ll have to see this through to the end.”

They came out of the Tomb. Bright sunlight greeted them as they stepped from the darkness. And,

Subaru: “—Kept you waiting, huh.”

???: “Tch.”

The person clicked his tongue in irritation as Subaru gave him a wave.

???: “—I wasn’t waitin’.”

—His entire body drenched in blood, eyes ablaze in hostility, Garfiel stood there.

Arc 4 Chapter 111 - Garfiel's Barrier

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 13, Chapter 7 "None Can Lift the Quain Stone Alone", Parts 1-2
(halfway)

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by SummaryAnon – [Complete](#), Page 153

Watching Garfiel stand there, even Subaru could see that he was riddled with injuries.

Countless wounds dyed Garfiel's body crimson-red while his shoulders heaved drawing ragged breaths. Blood seeped from the numerous lacerations and, except for the loincloth covering the lower portion of his scrawny figure, he was entirely exposed.

Having lost even his shoes, he stood there barefoot while Subaru lowered his lifted hand,

Subaru: "...Sure isn't the welcome I was expecting. I figured you'd be pissed, but never thought you'd wind up looking like that."

Garfiel: "Don't y'worry 'bout me. Just had'a slip'n fall, that's all."

Garfiel shot a glare of displeasure at Subaru's stiff remarks.

Of course, Garfiel was joking, but seeing him so wounded, Subaru couldn't help but imagine the worst. Garfiel had been running around the Sanctuary looking for Ryuzu, and he must've been held up by Otto's delaying efforts just as Subaru had planned.

So Subaru could think of only one possible scenario where Garfiel could've wound up in this state. And that is,

Subaru: "Otto you moron, I told you to just spill everything and run...!"

Garfiel: "Lil' bro was brave. Ain't made for fightin' though, probably never been in a real fight either. But he kept goin' on about doin' this fer a friend... Gave me a pretty hard time."

His cheeks ruefully twisted, Garfiel touched the white scar on his forehead.

He already had that wound before this, but does that mean every other wound on his body was from his fight with Otto?

Although, "fight" probably isn't the word for something this one-sided. Otto may be more adept at brawling than Subaru, but in a world overrun with ludicrously overpowered people, Otto ought to be classified as a non-combatant. When pitted against a real fighter like Garfiel, one of the strongest people Subaru knew, Otto should stand no chance of winning.

Not to mention that Subaru had only asked Otto to buy some time through petty tricks. Nothing more.

Subaru: "—He's not... dead, is he?"

A line of cold sweat rolled down Subaru's forehead. The worst possible scenario would be that the scene ended with Garfiel's claws tearing Otto apart. It'd be nice if he could laugh it off as some silly thought, but he couldn't. Not after seeing Garfiel in this state.

For Garfiel to have sustained these kinds of injuries, he must've been forced into a difficult fight. To hope that Garfiel had gone easy on Otto in the end would be too optimistic a thought.

But still, if Otto was dead, then it would all be pointless.

Not Otto's death— but Subaru's life would lose all meaning.

Emilia: "...Subaru."

Just as Subaru gulped down a breath, his thoughts descending towards despair, a voice like a silver chime called his name from behind. Those fingertips which had hesitated to touch him previously, now rested on his slumping shoulders. The weightless touch caused Subaru's deteriorating thoughts to stop.

He glanced behind him to find Emilia standing there, looking at him with worry in her eyes. It was clear that she had yet to sort out the emotions churning inside her.

This scene with Garfiel standing there, furious and slathered in blood, must've been incomprehensible from her perspective, though she could probably tell that this was no mundane affair. Yet, within those eyes gazing at Subaru, there was more concern than there was fear.

Subaru: "I'm fine, Emilia. I'm sorry you had to see me like this... Just now, I remembered who I have standing behind me, so I've calmed down now."

As if revived by her gaze, Subaru spilled a deep breath before turning back to Garfiel.

The entrance of the Tomb sat on a small slope, so Subaru was looking down to face him. Meanwhile, the brooding, slouching figure returned a piercing leer sharp enough to kill.

Garfiel: "Looks like while I was busy runnin' around, y'bastards were doin' whatever th'fuck y'wanted. Sneakin' sneakin' sneakin' sneakin', eh? Don't y'know how much I hate these dirty fuckin' tricks?"

Subaru: "I didn't know we needed your permission to do stuff around here. But you are a pretty easy person to read, so I could tell just from a glance. I figured you'd be mad, but also that you won't do anything more than that."

Garfiel: "Hah?"

In front of Garfiel's intimidation, Subaru only replied with a shrug. Perhaps because Subaru's tone didn't sound any more excited than usual, Garfiel scrunched his nose. Meanwhile, looking down at Garfiel's annoyed expression, Subaru's face tensed.

Subaru: "Garfiel. What did you do with Otto?"

Garfiel: "He pulled some shit on me... fer that, I chewed him to bits, 'n now his body's out fertilizin' th'forests."

Subaru: "———"

With a click of his razor fangs, Garfiel licked his lips, causing Emilia to swallow her breath. Overwhelming rage emanated from Garfiel's body. That alone conveyed how tough of a fight Otto had given him— as well as the fact that Garfiel could not have held back while fighting him.

And so,

Subaru: "Whew, so he's alive then. Hell, you had me seriously worried there... My guts had gone cold thinking that everything's ruined, no joke."

Garfiel: "...Ahh?"

Subaru: "But what the hell was he thinking... Well, he did say he managed to get Ram's help, so maybe she was the one putting weird ideas in his head? That does sound like something Ram would do... I mean, she never told us what she plans to do when push comes to shove."

Garfiel: "Oy, oy, th'fuck are y'doin'!?"

Subaru: "Which means, Ram's the reason you got all beat up, huh? Ahhhhh, that makes sense. No way Otto could've done this by himself. Hell, I almost thought Otto had been hiding some secret powers from me, that'd sorta fracture our friendship..."

Garfiel: "—M'therfucker! Th'fuck are you goin' on about! Huh?!?"

Garfiel barked in rage, stomping his surging emotions into the ground, rupturing it.

The earth caved beneath Garfiel's heel, creating a crater with him at its center. Fissures spread across the pit of the crater, sending up billowing dust around him as he bared his fangs.

Garfiel: "I said I fuckin' killed him! Th'guy's gone! He used his weird fuckin' D'vine Protection t'get th'forest on his side, screwed with me usin' fuckin' bugs and rats. 'n at th'end, he hit me with some huge magic he couldn't've cast by himself. So I respected his fightin' spirit— with my claws 'n fangs!"

Subaru: "Got the forest on his side... huh. Didn't know the Divine Protection of the Soul of Language could be used like that. That asshole, hiding something this important from me..."

Garfiel: "N' same goes fer Ram he got taggin' along with him! Fuckin' Ram came buttin' into our fight 'n attacked me wit'everythin' she's got... So I chewed her dead too."

Subaru: "..."

Gritting his teeth, Garfiel buried his face in his hands and looked up to the sky.

Meanwhile, wordlessly watching Garfiel's laments, Subaru ruminated over his statements.

So indeed, Ram and Otto had joined forces and decided to take on Garfiel. With Ram's assistance, perhaps they managed to drive Garfiel to the very brink of defeat. But still, the barricade presented by this beastman proved too thick.

Garfiel: "I don't feel like chasin' after th'fuckers who got away while he kept me distracted. But I ain't about t'overlook the shit yer pullin' here. Now step away from there. No one's goin' in th'Tomb anymore. I'm tearin' the fuckin' thing down."

Subaru: "If you do that, there'll be no way to break the barrier... The Sanctuary'll be closed off forever. Are you seriously okay with that?"

Garfiel: "I'm good with that. Everything except that's bad."

Saying this, Garfiel stepped out of the crater and towards the Tomb. His gait lost all trace of doubt, as if proclaiming he would not hesitate for an instant to act on his words.

His body was bloody and riddled with wounds, but even in this state, an unfathomable gap existed between them. Even with all his injuries, Garfiel's strength was leagues ahead of Subaru's. Both the crater at his heels and the ghastly aura emanating from his body made this clear. However,

Emilia: "I... I won't let you do that."

Here, aside from Subaru, there was yet another person standing in Garfiel's way.

Stepping up beside Subaru, Emilia placed herself between Garfiel and the Tomb. Seeing this, Garfiel looked up at her, unimpressed.

Garfiel: "What's this, oy. Weak lil' girls shouldn't get in my way."

Emilia: "No, I will stop you. I won't let you destroy the Tomb. Because I must pass the Trials, no matter what."

Garfiel: "It's obvious y'can't do it. Day after day, yer fuckin' bawlin' 'n cryin' all over th'place. 'n now yer sad 'cause y'lost yer lil' friend, yeah? Go curl up in bed'n keep cryin'. Do that, 'n I won't touch ya."

Emilia: "———Gh."

Sorrow flashed across Emilia's expression as she listened to Garfiel's cruel statements. But that expression only lasted for an instant as Emilia immediately swallowed down the pain.

Emilia: "Too bad, but no matter what you say, I cannot step away. I need to challenge the Trials. I need to face my past, and..."

Garfiel: "Every, fuckin', one of y... Tch!"

Cutting off Emilia's words, Garfiel clicked his tongue in irritation, his eyes blazing with fury.

The blood-curdling pressure emanating from his presence jolted in intensity, causing Emilia's shoulders to shudder. Noticing her frightened reaction, Garfiel sneered.

Garfiel: "What happened t'that bluster 'bout yer past? Th'second yer scared of my amazin' self, all goddamn chance yer ever gonna get over what yer most afraid of is out the window— No one can fuckin' do it. 'Tis just a malicious fuckin' ruse the Witch came up with so she can watch us 'n laugh."

Subaru: "Say, you have a pretty poor opinion of the Witch, huh."

Garfiel: "Huh?"

Hearing Subaru interrupt him, Garfiel turned his fiery glare from Emilia and jabbed his finger at Subaru.

Garfiel: "Th'fuck? Yer actually defendin' that fuckin' Witch? «No mornin' nor dusk for Potosk», they say, but what are ya, that fuckin' Witch's slave? Huh!?"

Subaru: "——"

Subaru fell silent at Garfiel's question.

Seeing this, Garfiel furrowed his brows in astonishment, as if he could not understand Subaru's silence.

The Witch sleeping inside the Tomb was Echidna. But the Miasma enshrouding Subaru's body belonged to the Witch of Envy. Only informed of its existence, but unable to smell the Miasma himself, Garfiel didn't know enough to tell the difference.

And naturally, with his willpower broken after only a single attempt, Garfiel had no real concept of Echidna's Trials, either.

Subaru: "You really are just half-assing everything, Garfiel."

Garfiel: "...Th'fuck d'ya just say?"

Putting together all of Garfiel's words and actions thus far, Subaru gave him this appraisal.

Hearing Subaru's unsparing assessment, Garfiel quietly muttered his threat. But despite Garfiel's menacing presence, Subaru looked him in the eyes without fear.

Subaru: "Just because you can't do it yourself, you think no one else can do it either. «This is how I think, so that guy must be the same as well»—— How complacent can you get?"

Garfiel: "..."

Subaru: "You are right, Emilia has failed the Trial multiple times. She was forced to watch a past she doesn't want to see and every time she came out crying, I won't deny that. When Puck left, she lost it so bad it was hard to watch, and I can't even confidently say that she's gotten over it yet."

In front of the silent Garfiel, Subaru jerked his chin at Emilia beside him.

Emilia looked at Subaru in surprise as she heard these sudden comments. But perhaps because she saw Subaru's expression as he said this, she did not interrupt him.

After all, Subaru was only voicing what Emilia already accepted herself. While certainly embarrassing, she could not ignore those facts. The fact she could face these judgements head-on was precisely what made her splendid despite her weakness. And so,

Subaru: "Maybe the results of the Trials won't change, even now. And she might still fail tonight and come back crying."

Garfiel: "If y'fuckin' know that, why are y'still doin' this over 'n ov..."

Subaru: "But Emilia will continue challenging it. Countless times—— Unlike you."

Garfiel: “———Hk.”

Garfiel swallowed his breath. Seeing the flash of doubt flickering through his razor-sharp gaze, Subaru fearlessly proclaimed his piece.

And then, looking him straight in the eyes once more,

Subaru: “Garfiel. You failed and ran away, but Emilia is nothing like you.”

Garfiel: “——Tch! Don’t you fuckin’ get cocky!!”

At the fall of Subaru’s words, Garfiel bellowed in rage, his right foot shattering the earth. The impact of his stomp sent the ground flying upwards. By some unknown mechanism, it took the shape of a square slab the size of a tatami mat as Garfiel kicked with his left foot.

The chunk of earth spun vertically, shrouding itself in a whirlwind as it zoomed past Subaru’s left ribs—— straight into the side of the Tomb’s entrance, crashing against the ancient structure.

Dust and a section of tangling ivy peeled from the rumbling wall of the Tomb. Yet, paying no heed to the debris raining onto his head, Subaru remained unflinching. Beside him, Emilia’s shoulders shuddered for only an instant, but, having heard Subaru’s previous words, she did not move from her spot.

Seeing the faint but definite trust between them, Garfiel’s eyes shot wide open the ferocious gleam in his bloodshot eyes intensifying.

Garfiel: “Th’fuck! I’ve had enough! Aaaaagh! I’ve had enough! Enough of yer fuckin’ smug, know-it-all faces! If I want I can tear ya to pieces so mutilated no one’ll be able t’tell th’two of y’apart! Don’t y’fuckin’ know that, huh!?”

Subaru: “I do know—— that you are incapable of doing that.”

Drawing ragged breaths, kicking at the earth, Garfiel barked out threat after threat. But his intimidations no longer had any impact on Subaru’s heart.

It was only natural. After everything that’s happened, with his conversation with Ryuzu and this present situation—— Subaru could finally understand what lay at Garfiel’s core.

Despite flaunting all his rage and hostility towards Subaru and Emilia, Garfiel—

Subaru: “You won’t kill me or Emilia. Or rather, you can’t. After all, Garfiel... you’ve never killed anyone before, have you?”

Garfiel: “———”

Subaru: “You fought with Otto and Ram, but you couldn’t have killed them. Otto’s one thing, but there’s no way you’d kill Ram. They aren’t showing up because you immobilized them somehow... and stopped there.”

At this, Garfiel’s aggravated behavior came to a halt. He stifled his breathing as he stared at Subaru. Meanwhile, hearing Subaru say this to Garfiel, a look of confusion rose in Emilia’s eyes. As she had only seen Garfiel’s usual self, Subaru’s declarations must’ve been rather difficult for her to understand.

But Subaru was confident.

Garfiel, at least while in humanoid form and possessing of his will, could not consciously decide to kill anyone.

—Subaru had had several confrontations with Garfiel in the loops up till now.

They’d been either due to differences in opinion, or to Garfiel abruptly viewing Subaru with hostility. Once, Subaru had taken a blow from Garfiel when he tried to murder Roswaal, losing an eye in the process. But it was also Garfiel who healed the one-eyed Subaru afterwards, and even when he turned completely hostile, he had never once killed Subaru.

There was a single exception— when Garfiel transformed into a tiger and slaughtered the refugees. It was a memory Subaru would rather not recall, but it was also a memory he could not forget, having been seared into his mind; that event which made him feel such hard to swallow emotions towards Garfiel, even now.

But thinking back on that day, there was something that Subaru had noticed.

Garfiel could not speak while in beast form. Swinging his claws and fangs according to his instincts, he'd become no more than an animal. So even when he turned his weapons on the villagers, he was merely acting on instincts.

But, back then, that first villager, when he killed that first person who marked the beginning of slaughter, Garfiel hesitated right up to the very, very end.

At the time, the excess of rage and panic had kept Subaru from understanding.

When Garfiel fell upon that very first person, Subaru thought adrenaline was making everything happen in slow-motion. But that was not the case. It was genuine hesitation. It was only once he killed him, when he finally lost that hesitation, that Garfiel truly became a beast.

Subaru could still remember the hatred he felt when he saw the great tiger's eyes as it had its taste of blood and life.

Subaru: "Your eyes aren't like those eyes back then. You haven't killed anyone, yet."

Garfiel: "Th'fuck's that's supposed t'mean? Ram's one thing, but I got no reason t'hesitate chewin' yer lil' lackey t'death."

Subaru: "Yeah, Ram's one thing."

Emilia: "H—hey, um... Do you two have some kind of grudge against Otto-kun...?"

Emilia timidly cut in to comment about Otto's unfortunate treatment in this conversation. But, perhaps for the first time ever, Subaru consciously ignored Emilia and jabbed his finger at the fuming Garfiel.

Subaru: "If you wanted to hit me, you would've. But you weren't trying to hit me. You were only barking threats. Your bloodlust is just for show. Makes you wonder which of us is the scared one."

Garfiel: "Oy, oy, oy... Mind what y'say, asshole. Keep goin', 'n those words might just be yer last."

Subaru: "Quit making threats you can't follow through on. I've already seen enough of cowards trying to act tough after those three idiots in that back alley. Though, at least they had the guts to stab me."

Garfiel: "Sh—shut up..."

Gritting his teeth, Garfiel shot Subaru an expression of fury.

But he was facing Natsuki Subaru. There was no better stage for this man's talents to shine than trying to piss off his opponent. And so,

Subaru: "Every day you groom those claws and fangs you are so proud of and keep'em nice and tidy, but they are just decoration, aren't they? In fact, how about putting on some nail stickers while you're at it? Girls are really into that stuff where I come from. Suits your sissy attitude nicely, don't you think?"

Garfiel: "I told y'ta fuckin' SHUT UP—!!"

Another impact.

The gouged-out earth shot through the air, skimming over Subaru's head, and crashing into the Tomb. There was no need to dodge. Garfiel never had any intention of hitting him.

Subaru: "If you wanna play with mud, go find a sandbox. You realize this thing behind me is a priceless historical artifact, right? Didn't you call yourself the Sanctuary's Guardian or something? This is the grave of your local Witch, you know. You shouldn't discriminate between friends."

Garfiel: "She ain't! My fuckin'! Friend! It's all because of that Witch buried here that... I... I... Tch!"

His glib tongue was in perfect form. Faced with Subaru's provocations, Garfiel's breaths grew faltering and feeble. He had pushed his wounded body to get here. On top of that, he had to endure this exhausting conversation and waste his stamina on meaningless shows of force. His blood flow had accelerated in tune with his emotions, reopening his previously-sealed wounds.

Standing there, drawing ragged breaths, Garfiel glared at Subaru. Then suddenly, his gaze turned to Emilia at Subaru's side. He furrowed his nose, as if having noticed something,

Garfiel: "Oy... th'fuck are y'doin'. Th'fuck's with those eyes."

Emilia: "..."

Garfiel: "If y'got somethin' t'say, say it! It's pissin' me off gettin' looked at like that!"

Perhaps seeing something inside Emilia's wordless gaze, Garfiel howled.

Watching him with complex emotions resting in her amethyst eyes, Emilia shook her head at Garfiel's request,

Emilia: "Garfiel... Just, what are you so afraid of?"

Garfiel: "I'm, afraid... yer sayin'?"

Emilia: "Well you are afraid. You are talking loud, reaching out as best you can, and stomping the ground to cheer yourself up, aren't you?"

Garfiel: "Like ya fuckin' know anything 'bout me..."

Emilia: "I do know. After all—"

Cutting off Garfiel's quieter statement, Emilia took a single breath.

Emilia: "—I've also been living in constant fear of many things."

Garfiel's breathing froze. Emilia touched her chest, her fingers confirming the absence of the crystal, a fleeting sense arising in her eyes.

Emilia: "I managed to get to this moment, while always scared of lots of things. I left lots of things to Puck, I leaned on him... I didn't notice I was doing it, and yet I made it here. But today, since just a moment ago, I feel like I finally understand it a little."

Garfiel: "Shut up."

Emilia: "I don't clearly know what's right yet, nor what it is I have to do. But I feel like I know that there's something. And I can find that something inside the Tomb. I cannot move out of your path."

Garfiel: "Shut it. Disappear. Don't talk to me."

Emilia: "...But don't you truly already have that something?"

Garfiel: "—Hk!"

Past his limit, Garfiel's head sprung up. His knees bent slightly, his petite frame to go bounding off like a shot right after. He leapt for Emilia with horrifying speed— But just before he is able to reach her, Subaru cut in between them.

Subaru: "Garfiel!"

Garfiel: "—Tch!"

Reaching his arms out towards the oncoming Garfiel, Subaru charged while simultaneously protecting Emilia.

The strike connected, and Subaru was sent tumbling, wincing in pain at the battering. After rolling several times from the momentum, he stopped face-up on the ground. Garfiel put his claws to the fallen Subaru's neck as he bares his fangs at Emilia.

Garfiel: "Right now! Right fuckin' now, get away from here! Don't, 'n I'm paintin' yer clothes red with th'blood from his dismembered neck!"

Emilia: "Subaru—"

Emilia prepared for battle. She may have lost Puck, but she was still a practitioner of Spiritual Arts. She could enlist help from her contracted Micro Spirits to use magic. Leaving aside whether she would win, she was in a position to fight Garfiel.

And thus Emilia immediately moves to build up mana—

Subaru: "Emilia, stop! I'm fine! He won't do anything anyway!"

Garfiel: "Shut it! Fuckin' enough, I'm sick of this crap! My ears are rottin' off listenin' t'th'bullshit from you 'n that woman! If I rip open that loose mouth'ov yers 'n cut off yer jaw, maybe ya ain't gonna talk 'bout this shit no more?"

Subaru: "—Guh."

Leaning down on the fallen Subaru, Garfiel ran his sharp claws over his left cheek. Their points gouge into his flesh, Subaru wailing quietly at the burning pain.

But even still, his eyes do not yield.

Subaru: “You get us out of the way, destroy the Tomb, and then what...? You think running and running and running is going to let you get away?”

Garfiel: “It’s yer own regret. Who can do anythin’ ‘bout it? That thing ain’t got th’slightest inclination to let us get away. Why don’t’cha get that!”

Subaru: “No, I don’t get it, Garfiel— Since your past, and your regrets, can be overcome.”

Garfiel: “———”

Subaru’s assertion.

And simultaneously, Garfiel and Emilia swallowed their breath.

Subaru: “It was painful, it was suffering, it was so overwhelmingly pathetic that I couldn’t face anyone, and I gave up. But the only who thought it was hopeless was me, and actually, nothing was beyond hope at all.”

Say those were fake events, false parents, and created from memories, Subaru faced his biggest regret, and got a single answer out of it, as well as a goodbye.

The Trial assuredly did confer Subaru with pain. Just remembering it made his insides creak perpetually, and it branded Subaru with both his past and his suffering.

Subaru: “But, including that pain and absolutely everything, I swallowed my past. Swallowed it whole. While yes, that Witch is an asshole, and I’ll never forget how she betrayed me when I tried to trust her.”

The visage of the white-haired Witch, always smiling mysteriously, passed through his mind. No matter how much time passed, Subaru would never unravel his complicated feelings about her. But there should be no need to betray even the feeling that he acquired back then.

Subaru: “I’m grateful to the Witch. I’m glad I could face my past. I ran, I ran, I ran, and I ran. But I’m glad I couldn’t escape.”

Garfiel: “———”

Subaru: "Garfiel— Are you seriously still running from your past with your family?"

Garfiel: "Wh—!?"

Garfiel's face changed colors. It reddened in rage, paled in astonishment, and now, turns pallid. The clicking of his fangs resulted from the trembling of his chattering teeth. With chills, or perhaps in dread, Garfiel looked down at Subaru.

Garfiel: "Who... told you... about my past?"

Subaru: "Basically everyone you are thinking of. Do you think that's a betrayal? Or do you think it's something else?"

Garfiel: "Uh, ah... Huh—"

The overwhelming fury kept Garfiel from doing as much as speaking as he let out choppy, faltering breaths. His breathing was intermittent. Witnessing this violent shock happening immediately before his face, Subaru continued.

Subaru: "The Witch told me you are afraid of the outside world."

Garfiel's reply was nowhere to be found.

Subaru: "Frederica told me when she offered you to leave with her, you denied her."

Garfiel's reply was nowhere to be found.

Subaru: "Ryuzu-san told me the thing you saw in the Tomb, was your goodbye with your mother."

Garfiel's reply was—

Garfiel: "Mo... ther."

Subaru: "I heard the superficial outline of your and Frederica's circumstances. You are siblings from a human mother, and two different half-blood demi-human fathers. You two quarter-bloods aren't bound by Sanctuary's barrier. Frederica left Sanctuary so she could create a place to receive the people from here, for when the barrier is eventually broken."

Garfiel: "Sister..."

Subaru: "But you didn't take Frederica's hand, and stayed inside. Why did you? What is it you want to do, for what purpose is it, that you are still here?"

His breathing was labored.

Garfiel's hand slowly put in more force, as it pressed Subaru to the ground. He was not doing this to silence Subaru. Garfiel was entirely exhausted, to the point that if did not put his strength into something, cling to something, he would imminently break down.

Subaru: "In the Tomb you saw your past. You saw your mother leaving you and Frederica behind in Sanctuary... Didn't you?"

Garfiel: "-----"

Subaru: "Is that the reason you are avoiding the outside world?"

Silence is golden— An admission.

Garfiel remained silent, looking at Subaru with weakest gaze he has given yet. It could not even be called a glare, this powerless look.

His expression was that of a small child, scared of his secrets being exposed.

Guilt for cutting into another's wounds arose in Subaru's chest. He subdued the feeling, grappling it down, as he pressed Garfiel for the truth. And so, he stabbed his finger into the faintly visible wound, forcing the hole wider, letting the blood flow out in droves.

Subaru: "Because your mother abandoned you. Because you hate your mother who abandoned you, because you hate the outside world that took your mother, you detest the outside world!?"

His theories from speaking with Ryuzu. His advice from Echidna, and her statement that Garfiel fears the outside world. The reason his goodbye with his family remained in Garfiel's heart, and even now stung him like barbs.

Hearing the assertive tone of Subaru's statement, Garfiel frantically shook his head.

Garfiel: “No! No, nonononononono, yer wrong!! The fuck’d you goddamn understand! Stop runnin’ yer mouth like ya know shit!”

Subaru: “That’s right! What I said are my imaginings, and what my mouth’s running is nothing but know-it-all nonsense. The only one who can say what you are really thinking is you. If I’m wrong, then what are your actual feelings on this!?”

Force pressed down on his lungs. Subaru showed no pained expression as he raises his voice. Showered in Subaru’s voice from below him, Garfiel’s face stiffened, and looked away.

Subaru: “You rejected Frederica who left for the outside, you bound yourself with the duty to protect Sanctuary, and you are interfering with people who challenge the Trial while they attempt to break the barrier! What is it you are scared of! What is it you fear! So you just hate the outside world!?”

Garfiel: “Yer, all wrong...!”

Subaru: “So you just hate your mother who abandoned you! You challenged the Trial, saw yourself being abandoned, and so that’s what you are afraid of!!”

Garfiel’s expression twisted in grief.

He lifted his hand from Subaru, up-righting himself in an attempt to escape Subaru’s verbal pursuit. But he would not get away.

Subaru reached out, grabbed the back of Garfiel’s neck, and pulled him to a stop. With Garfiel’s gruesome, blood-soaked face within breathing range, Subaru glared at him, pressing further.

Subaru: “Answer me, Garfiel! What is it you are afraid of!”

His theory, crafted from speaking with Ryuzu, Echidna’s words, Roswaal and Frederica’s attitudes, Ram’s expression when she looks at Garfiel— Subaru saw an answer, different from all of theirs. If he was right, if this was the truth, then...

Garfiel: “No, my amazin’ self’s... my amazin’...”

Subaru: “What is it, what do you truly think!?!?”

Garfiel: "My amazing... My, mother..."

Garfiel swallowed his breath, gazing up at the sky, his fangs chattering---

Garfiel: "-----I WANTED HER TO BE HAPPY!!"

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Garfiel: "We were in the way, weren't we!? Myself and my sister, we were in the way of her happiness, weren't we!?"

Overflowing. This had been everything that Garfiel had been holding in until now.

Garfiel: "Well I knew that! She abandoned me and sis. And o'course she would!"

Garfiel's reasoning, which he had kept in his heart, never revealed to anybody.

Garfiel: "Couple of goddamn brats she couldn't've wanted, 'n ones with demi-human blood at that... O'fuckin' course we'd hold'er back from living in the outside world! Leaving us behind, throwing us away, what is weird about that... There's nothing... wrong in that!"

Unable to hide his wavering voice, he buried his face in his hands to hide his wavering eyes.

Garfiel: "I get why we were abandoned. So I don't resent mom for abandoning us! 'Tis goddamn obvious! Myself and my sis, we were holdin' our mom's life back! She threw us away, and left Sanctuary so she could be happy!"

While still young, Garfiel had seen his mother off as she left the two of them behind and exited Sanctuary. He could not have understood what he felt back then. But the feeling had laid its roots in him, grown inside him over a long span of time, and bloomed into a single answer--- His mother had just abandoned them. However.

Garfiel: "But y'know, that night... I, saw it. There in th'Tomb, in th'Trial, I saw it. I saw it. S--she, left us, and left Sanctuary, and... Right there, right after she left, her carriage got caught in a landslide, swallowed in the dirt and she just died..."

Subaru: “———!”

Garfiel: “Sis doesn’t know... Sis thinks mom’s off somewhere, forgotten ‘bout us and livin’ a happy life. That’s not what really happened! Mom, the second she abandoned us! She died!”

Fragments of the truth, sobbed out of Garfiel’s mouth. Their harshness overwhelmed both Subaru, who was already aware of the circumstances, and Emilia, who was completely caught off-guard.

Garfiel remained before the silenced two, head still buried in his hands, his breathing ragged with his weeping.

Garfiel: “She just damn died... She never got to be happy!!”

Subaru could not possibly reply to that.

Garfiel: “Why? You know she left for th’outside so she could be happy, don’t’cha?”

Emilia could not possibly reply to that.

Garfiel: “You know she left us because she wanted to be happy, don’t’cha?”

Neither Subaru nor Emilia could possibly reply to that.

Garfiel: “She abandoned us, but if she never got to be happy and just died immediately, then...”

The unanswerable questions stream from Garfiel’s mouth. And surely——

Garfiel: “...What are we meant to do ‘bout our sadness, about this feeling o’bein’ thrown away?”

——These questions had always, always chorused eternally inside his heart.

Garfiel: “I wanted mom to be happy!”

Strength came to his teary voice. Garfiel drew his hands away from his face, gritting his teeth as he pauses. His fangs could crack. His canines could tear through his lips.

Garfiel: “All the sadness we felt! And all the loneliness of being disowned! It was meaningful because it was for her happiness, that’s what I wanted to think! I wanted to be able to hate mom!”

Having lost a target for his feelings about his mother, Garfiel's heart had been trapped inside Sanctuary. Without anything to strike against, his emotions had been the fuel to keep aflame the blaze consuming his soul.

Garfiel: "But mom just died! Me and sis, we had a sad experience and that was it. Mom didn't get to be happy at all, heavy rocks and sand buried her, and she fuckin' died in agony."

Having reached this conclusion, amid the smoldering ashes inside him, Garfiel decided. Standing up, he then drew away from Subaru. Looking up at the Tomb, in a low voice he proclaimed,

Garfiel: "— I ain't ever going t'the outside world."

His voice shook.

In rage, in sorrow, in vestiges of fury, the flame still blazing, even now.

Garfiel turned around.

He looked down at the fallen Subaru, and clicks his sharp fangs.

Garfiel: "Desertin' th'place and going outside ain't going to give you happiness! Trying to change anything comes with pain, and not everybody can withstand that hurt!"

Subaru: "——"

Garfiel: "There's tons of hopeless people out there! This place's full'o'them! What'm I meant to do!? Just make'm sacrifices for happiness, and give'm sad experiences?! Just be like my sis!?"

Subaru: "——"

Garfiel: "I will... My amazin' self will... protect them."

He clenched his fists. His howling was brought to a close, his eyes hosting quiet determination as he paused.

Garfiel: "My amazin' self'll protect'em. Everythin' my hands can reach, my amazin' self'll protect. Protect, protect, protect... Never ever lose anybody... Never let anyone experience anythin' like what my mom did!"

Not anger, not sadness, prompted Garfiel's heart to tremble.

Neither Subaru, nor Emilia, was able to move when faced with these feelings of Garfiel's. And so, Garfiel spread his arms wide, turning his back to the Tomb, and shouted.

Garfiel: "I'll be the barrier! A real one, dividing inside and outside, a barrier!"

Subaru: "Garfiel..."

Garfiel: "I! Will! Protect Sanctuary, protect everyone! Protect nanna! My amazin' self's the only one who can do it! My amazin' self's the only one who knows it! And it's fine for them not to know!!"

Garfiel's high bloody scream, his resolve, his determination. Faced with that, they cannot speak.

Garfiel has steeled his resolve entirely. And so—

Emilia: "—Subaru."

Subaru: "It's okay, Emilia."

Emilia called out to Subaru as he stood up, stepping forth.

He waved his hand to her concerned voice in dismissal, as he approaches Garfiel. The two faced each other, mutually between an arm's reach. Words would no longer stop Garfiel.

And so, there was only one thing left to do.

Subaru: "You goddamn stubborn, oblivious bastard..."

Garfiel: "———"

Subaru: "I understand your resolve. My assumptions were wrong. And your assumptions are wrong too. And so... I'll go and rectify them."

Garfiel stooped down slightly, his arms dangling at his sides. Although he may look undefended, an abnormal and ghastly aura emanated from him as he took a serious battle stance.

And in response, Subaru raised his hands to take his own battle stance, as well. With Garfiel as his opponent, having determined that words will not work, he will fight him on his own turf.

Subaru: "I'll force you into absolute surrender, and teach you— That you are a kind, weak, stupid idiot!"

Arc 4 Chapter 112 - Instinct to Reject Weakness

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 13, Chapter 7 “None Can Lift the Quain Stone Alone”, Part 2
(halfway, heavily abridged)

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by SummaryAnon – [Complete](#), Page 169

—The fight peaked with unimaginable severity.

Two men faced each other, trading fists head-on.

Hard bones battering into flesh, muscles bursting, blood dripping. Along come the wails, the unpleasant heaving of frothy respiration, the wretchedness of the sloppy fistfight as it burned into the eyes of the lone observer.

Emilia: “...Subaru.”

Standing before the Tomb’s entrance, Emilia put her hand to her chest, looking over the duel. Her eyes hosted confusion, her fingers wavered in search of something to cling to. Despite being aware of its absence, the warmth of the perpetually reliable presence at her chest still bound her heart.

Subaru had told her things inside the Tomb. Subaru asserted that he loved her, cherished her, and so he believed in her. Indeed, a part of her did feel saved by these words. However, anxiety compounded within her heart.

As the seconds ticked, her true memories were being resurrected.

She had believed that those false memories were where she began, and holding that belief, reached this point. Once her beginnings changed, once her starting point changed; just how would it change her?

Her truest feelings conflicted with each other in discord, and unease rooted deep within Emilia. Subaru had shouted that even if Emilia were to change, his love for her would remain unfazed. This boy who had

been hurt, who had suffered for her, and who attempted to fight to the end for her— She did not possess a speck of doubt about his feelings. He had proved them continuously.

—The one thing she was not able to trust was her own self.

She had walked along a path which had its foundations set in an incorrect beginning, and although she thought she had the end of this road in sight, she stopped. She wondered whether she might have been walking in the wrong direction, and hesitated despite having her target in sight.

Her feet had stopped moving. Would she be permitted to start walking again?

Would the road from on be a new one, or the same she has walked down so far?

Emilia: “———”

She wandered within a labyrinth of unanswerable, impenetrable questions.

Even now, unable to speak up, and aware that she lacked any right to stop them, Emilia watched the two men fight.

???: “———!”

A scream. Reaching great heights, blood splattered.

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Cutting through the air, the swing of a fist.

Knuckles came looming for his face— at depressingly slow velocity.

???: “Tch!”

No need for an excessive dodge. He tilted his head in the barest minimum, evading the fist without sustaining even a graze. His opponent’s stance disintegrated due to that big swing, and his knee jabbed into the adversary’s undefended stomach, aiming to their bowels.

His knee felt their rib-bones and flimsy muscles, the attack's force transmitted to the depths of their gut. Their mouth, already subject to expelling fluids multiple times, vomited up blood unrelenting.

???: "Gah!"

They held their stomach, movements faltering, visage atrocious. He pounded his uplifted arms into their slouched back, a combination that followed his frontal attack, to now scramble their innards from behind.

They had managed to withstand the kick, but they failed to endure the strike from behind and easily collapsed. He kicked them to rotate their fallen body upwards, then followed up his attack by driving his toes into their left flank.

Their screams echoed.

Their breathing heaved, mixed with vomit and blood.

His fists, his knee, his toes. With every strike, the sensation of their skin, of their flesh paring away, rebounded on to him.

Usually that would jubilate him, but presently he only felt incredible discomfort.

These actions repeated, over and over and over and over— What in the world was the point?

Garfiel: "Enough's goddamn 'nough, fuckin' give up already."

He cast jeers on his coughing, unsightly opponent as they spit up blood.

He was failing to take their consciousness. He could strike their head, kick their stomach, but they quite detestably would not concede. Especially detestable, considering he was attempting to make them understand the disparity in strength between them.

Garfiel: "Ya sure a fuckin' brainless bastard, oy! Ya ain't gotta hint of a chance of winnin'! Yer back's slouched! Yer swings're pointlessly big! Yer balance's wobblin' everywhere, 'tis a goddamn tragedy!"

Subaru: "...My bad."

Garfiel: “Aaargh, ya fuckin’ pile o’shit! Do ya know what it feels like, t’have t’entertain this pointless, pigheaded game of yers? Get outta ‘ere, fuck off.”

Garfiel spat his insults at Subaru, who was attempting, with laborious breaths, to upright himself.

Subaru’s hands contacted the ground in a struggle to push himself up. Having been the recipient to punches, his face was swollen, and his nosebleed coated the lower portion of his face in red. Some of his teeth were surely broken or missing. Between his guts and ribs, it wouldn’t be strange for some of them to be busted. Considering the violent pain ravaging his body, he should not have been able to even remain conscious. And yet.

Garfiel: “What’s th’damn point! Didn’t ya challenge me ‘cause ya thought ya had hopes of winnin’! All yer fuckin’ doin’ is showin’ off how ragged ‘n beaten ya’re, I can’t even watch it...! Take a nap!”

Subaru: “—Guh!”

Call it obstinacy, call it stubbornness, yet those words could not describe the tenacity Garfiel sensed, as he once again brutalized Subaru.

He swept Subaru’s legs out from under him, and drove his foot into Subaru’s flank as he collapsed. Blood spewed from Subaru’s mouth as Garfiel kicks his tumbling form skyward, then drove his elbow into his suspended frame to shunt him back to the ground.

Ricocheting off the earth, he comes to lie spread-out on the floor. His eyes open wide, he exhaled an airy breath, and this time for sure would remain motionless— finally knocked into unconsciousness. Garfiel breathed out a long sigh.

Subaru: “Why are you, looking like it’s, over...”

Garfiel: “—Hk!”

Garfiel’s shoulders heaved as he drew ragged breaths, as a voice from below prompted his eyes to shoot open in shock. The man he surely had knocked unconscious somehow, wavering, managed to stand.

Garfiel: “Don’t, you joke...”

Subaru: “Yeah... This is, no joke here. With how beaten up I am, I... can’t think of a... single, funny quip...”

Garfiel: “That ain’t what I m—”

Subaru: “—Haaaaaaa!”

Exhibiting nightmarish doggedness, Subaru spat a sharp breath and swung his fist.

Naturally, no matter how desperate the punch is, from Garfiel’s perspective it would amount to something equivalent to being assaulted by a child. His hand easily caught and diverted the oncoming fist, and he drives the heel of his palm into Subaru’s guts as compensation. The strike drilled into a space between his organs, the impact rippling through his body and reaching his internal fluids— his already-vacant stomach constricted, and blood and yellowy bile flowed out.

Subaru: “Guh, buh...”

Garfiel: “It’s th’same thing no matter how many times ya try, how many times do—”

Subaru held his stomach and crumbled on the spot as Garfiel once again urged him to surrender. He could not bear to watch this disgusting atrocity. Averting his gaze, Garfiel clicked his tongue.

Garfiel: “———!”

Subaru’s right fist then roared past the tip of his nose.

Garfiel: “Wh——!?”

Subaru: “Hey, Garfiel. Who gave you permission to just ditch me?”

Left arm forward, right arm back.

Seeing Subaru readied in combat stance, his will to fight not abolished in the least, Garfiel felt something near a shiver.

He did not consider Subaru a threat for even a moment. Anyone could tell Subaru was making empty threats, as between him and Garfiel existed a disparity in power too great for any amount of struggling to compensate. He could keep sending Garfiel these reckless punches, but be it a thousand times or a million times, the unsurmountable strength gap meant Garfiel would simply dodge every attempt.

All of Subaru's struggling, every single moment of it, was futile.

No matter how many times Garfiel punched, kicked, threw him, no matter how much pain he sustained, his overstressed body would never, ever, touch Garfiel.

Garfiel: "You bastard, stop kiddin'round!"

Subaru: "Haaa?"

Facing an opponent who could not win, he nevertheless lofted stubbornness alone as his weapon. His spirit alone would not fold, his feelings alone would not falter. Perhaps that mentality ought to be called strength, a strength unbound by the flesh.

Seeing him stand up after falling again and again perhaps did jolt Garfiel's heart to some degree.

But, if he expected this display would make Garfiel change his mind, that constituted an insult beyond parallel.

His spirit alone would not fold and would not bend. And what in the world was the point in those concepts, exactly?

Garfiel: "Do ya really think that if ya keep bein' bullhead'd, even knowin' ya won't win, my amazin' self's eventually gonna stay my fists? Really think that my amazin' self's gonna get sick of punchin' 'n kickin' ya, acknowledge yer determination, 'n stand down... that I'm gonna lose by concedin' to emotions, is that what yer trying to say!?"

Subaru: "-----"

Garfiel: "Don't joke around. This fight between me and you ain't a fuckin' game! Ya beat'em down, er ya get beat down. There ain't any other endings to this!"

He stomped the ground. The power of his Divine Protection of Earth Spirits filled him, the earth supplying his body with overflowing vitality. Compared to when he had finished fighting Ram and Otto in the forest, and then pushed his ruined body to venture here, his flesh was now in better condition. This not-even-a-fistfight with Subaru was not exacerbating his fatigue; in fact, he may as well be sitting under a tree, relaxing in its shadow, and having a pleasant reprieve.

And this minuscule influence of Subaru's was meant to sway Garfiel's heart just how?

Garfiel: "Yer goddamn said it, didn't you! That yer gonna teach my amazin' self that I'm weak, that's what yer goddamn said! Well th'fuck is this, then! The fuck is weak! The fuck are you teachin'! The one who ain't got th'strength and 's gettin' forced into surrender, the brainl'ss idiot here is goddamn you!"

Garfiel remembered every syllable of Subaru's pre-battle declaration. It was ripe in utter buffoonery. Entirely farcical. Every inch of this man was a definition of the word "fraudulent".

Garfiel: "That guy 'n Ram too! Both of them battled me and at least had th'guts to try 'n win! That's why I fought them back with everythin' I had. They worked their brains comin' up with plans, compensatin' for their weaknesses by usin' their smarts... Those two had guts enough for me t'acknowledge them. But what about you!"

While he did not know the exact details of how it worked, Otto had used his Divine Protection to get the forest on his side, and cornered Garfiel. His methods of herding Garfiel into that final blast of incredible magic illustrated that he had utilized all his vitality and intellect, his fighting spirit so great that Garfiel would gladly commend it as the apex of what the weak were able to do.

Ram's offensive had begun with her surprise attack, and although it made him feel agony equivalent to betrayal, was indeed a fight perfectly befitting of Ram. Merciless, no punches pulled, a battle between those of genuine strength.

Both had made their most desperate efforts while fighting Garfiel, and fully intended to steal victory. Their methods deserved esteem. So much that Garfiel had to recognize them as glorious foes.

Garfiel: "Compared to them... There's no way ya could be more obscene. Ya get done in 'n done in 'n ya have the gall to still stand up... So what? No matter how much yer beaten, yer spirit won't yield... So fuckin' what? Even sayin' yer hopes of winnin' are zero, ya ain't ever fleein' the fight... What's so commendable 'bout that!?"

Subaru: "-----"

Garfiel: "Ya think I'm impressed? That yer bloodsoaked, wobbly-legged, can't even open yer eyes right, still standin' up show is gonna stir my feelings 'n I'm gonna stand down? I'm gonna churn you to mincemeat... What kinda idiot do ya wanna make of me, 'n of th'people who acted for yer sake?"

The greatest indignation Garfiel has ever felt in his life was blazing within his chest.

The purity of the fight has been defiled. He has been insulted. And not only that, but this man's methods were attempting to pollute the nobility, the resolute will, of those whose fights Garfiel had acknowledged.

Garfiel: "Take a nap. Give up. Yer disgustin', a miserable pile of pile of pile of shit. Yer best answer's to accept you've lost. Go curl up and take a nap in yer cot, you halfwit."

Subaru: "..."

Still in his fighting stance, Subaru bathed in Garfiel's curses.

His head slumps unsteadily, his eyes nearly swollen shut but somehow managing to capture Garfiel. His will to fight had not waned, which made his filthiness an eyesore.

If all these words, these blows, these punches were not managing to bend his spirit, then what did he have to do to break him?

If pain will not achieve it, then only one solution remains.

Garfiel: "How 'bout you try tellin' him, huh!?"

Turning around, Garfiel called out to Emilia, who was observing the fight from the Tomb's entrance. Her shoulders trembled minutely as the conversation is suddenly aimed at her. The display of weakness made Garfiel click his tongue in irritation.

Garfiel: "Ya can't bear to watch, now you tell him that! He ain't listenin' when I say it. Have th'girl he loves tell him he looks disgustin' 'n lame, that his efforts ain't achievin' nothin', that he's absolutely worthless!"

Emilia: "I—I..."

Garfiel: "What!? Yer sayin' y'can't do it? Does it look t'you he still has any hope of winnin'? Or do ya like watchin' this? Ya watch the guy who loves you get torn up 'n broken down for yer sake, 'n does that deceive you into feelin' yer loved, are you for real, oy!"

Emilia: “—Hk!”

Emilia froze rigid, her eyes wide open, as spite showered upon her. Garfiel’s merciless statements thrust daggers into the onlooking Emilia.

If Garfiel’s fists would not stop Subaru, then Emilia’s words were the only option. His body would be broken by Garfiel, his heart would be broken by Emilia, and then even Subaru would surely yield.

Over the course of watching the fight, Emilia’s face had twisted in pain multiple times as she witnessed Subaru be beaten. Unlike Subaru, fueled by his mysterious resolve, Emilia’s heart has not steeled itself for anything yet. She is still the same girl who lost the Trial and sobbed wailing afterwards.

Garfiel had no intention to lambaste her for that.

To be overwhelmed by the Trial, by your past, was natural. Who on earth could negate the memory of their greatest regret?

The concept that you could overcome your past, your regrets, was utter bullshit.

Subaru had mixed up realistic ideals and unattainable fantasies. Lunatic. This boy who was persistently standing before him chased entirely after fantasies, and demanded that others do the same. He was legitimately insane.

He was the same breed as Roswaal, an imbecile whose vision encompassed one thing and nothing more.

Garfiel: “Stop him, ‘n end this! Both me, ‘n you! We are dancin’ to th’tune of that Witch’s bullshit. That’s what’s really happenin’ here.”

Emilia: “I—”

Emilia’s back straightened as if struck by lightning, her eyes shooting open. Her captivating eyes were damp with tears as she looks at Subaru. Her lips quivered, Garfiel’s gaze still fixed on her, as she moved to plead Subaru to stop. Everything would be over then. But—

Subaru: “—Emilia.”

Emilia: “———”

Before she could speak, Subaru was the one to call out.

She closed her mouth as she listened intently to Subaru's faint voice. Frantic, so as not to miss whatever he may say to her. To her, Subaru stated merely one, single thing.

Subaru: "...Witness me."

Nothing more.

Spoken with a frail voice, practically nothing but a whisper to himself.

But Emilia heard it. She looked up in astonishment, and after several seconds of hesitation—

Emilia: "—Mhm."

— She put her hand to her chest and nodded.

Garfiel: "...Hah!?"

Faced with their entirely incomprehensible exchange, Garfiel shouted in confusion. His eyes widened in fury, only for Subaru to jab his finger towards his opponent.

Subaru: "...So you've been going on complaining for a while now, but you got it all wrong, Garfiel."

Garfiel: "What?"

Subaru: "To you, I may look like an idiot putting in their all despite having no chance of winning... But I'm not joking around. I've learned my lesson on knowingly getting into fights I can't win, after withstanding this pain. Thanks to you, I'm never doing it again."

Subaru's face was a swollen mess, yet it still managed to twist into a scowl.

This event that Subaru is referring to is nothing that Garfiel could ever know about, but apparently it related to some overwhelmingly detested memory of his. But even pitted against that sentiment, there was something he said. Something which Garfiel must not overlook.

Garfiel: "Ridiculous. It ain't even ideals or fantasy anymore, yer not seein' reality at all. If ya stopped challengin' opponents ya can't beat... If this is okay... then what's with this, oy!?"

Subaru: "Isn't it obvious, you idiot? I still... haven't given up the fight for even a moment."

Perhaps his consciousness was compounding in clarity as he speaks, for strength began to return to Subaru's voice as he made his assertion. His baseless vitality sealed Garfiel's throat mute with blinding rage.

Subaru: "As long as I can still stand, I haven't given up the fight. And the point where I stop standing back up only happens once I'm dead."

Garfiel: "-----"

Subaru: "And with how you chicken out during the decisive moments, you can't kill me. Meaning you can't stop me. It might only be bit-by-bit, but I'm inching toward my win. My victory is certain."

Garfiel: "Ya imbecile! This ain't about bein' able to kill or not. How the fuck! By doing nothin' but struggle! Are you fuckin' possibly goin' to beat me!?"

When wounded head to toe and as ragged as an old dishcloth, any amount of words would ring hollow. Subaru's statements equated to nothing more than extravagant prate. "You can't stop me unless you kill me", was merely an expression of his volition. And assuming that claim was legitimate, he was then meaning to state that unless killed, he was able to keep on fighting, and eventually manage to land a fatal blow on Garfiel?

That would not happen, for it would need incredible quantities of time and miracles to ever happen.

Garfiel: "If my amazin' self breaks yer limbs, then ya can't do nothin', it's over! Whether yer conscious, or whether ya wanna win! None of that matters anymore!"

Garfiel roared in furious rage. His feet siphoned vitality from the ground, his once-fatigued body regaining strength halfway to his usual. This was more than enough power to mutilate Natsuki Subaru.

He stomped off the earth, flying in the direction of Subaru.

Faced with Garfiel's approach, Subaru jabbed out his fist as if happy about this turn of events. It's moronic. Slow. Unequivocally insufficient. Garfiel easily dodged it, and struck him in the abdomen. Drove

his knee into his chin, grabbed Subaru as he recoiled and threw him plunging to the ground. For good measure, Garfiel buried his heel into his fallen form, wresting out two or three screams of agony.

A merciless series of attacks. And with this---

Subaru: "It's over, you think?"

Garfiel: "---!! What the fuck is this!?"

Supposedly sustaining even more grievous bodily wounds, Subaru stood up. Witnessing it, an unknown, arcane feeling began to seize Garfiel's heart.

Was he unable to defeat him? Was he unable to win? No, those were not the sources of his anxiety.

It was the suspicion that maybe, truly, exactly as this man stated, merely the accumulation of physical damage would not be enough to stop him.

Garfiel: "What th'hell is the point in riskin' yer life for this! Say you somehow manage to beat my amazin' self, do ya really think that half-devil can beat the Trial! You seriously think that's the case here, huh!?"

Subaru: "-----"

Garfiel: "Like such a miracle could happen! Like that convenient patter could happen! Million to one, billion to one chance, sayin' you'll beat my amazin' self, doing that ain't gonna change anythin' 'bout that woman! 'n it's the same for anyone! When ya got a messed up, hopeless past... When ya see how yer regrets have been cooked for years, ya can't do goddamn anything about it! Why don't'cha understand this!"

Subaru: "You are the one who should be hearing that question!!"

Garfiel: "-----!?"

It was devoid of enough momentum to be a burst of outrage and possessed too much emotion to be an appeal. The cracks skirting through Garfiel's words barren of logic, fractured further beneath Natsuki Subaru's yell.

Subaru: "Stop going off deciding everything on your own, Garfiel!"

Garfiel: "What are you..."

Subaru: "Stop going off deciding what Emilia's limits are. She isn't that weak."

Distant, standing before the Tomb, Emilia swallowed her breath.

Subaru: "Stop going off, deciding what my limits are. No one tells me to fold, or to abandon everything and cower. I shall never surrender."

Spitting blood, the glint in Subaru's eyes grew stronger. And,

Subaru: "Fucker, don't go off giving up on yourself. You can do a lot more. There is a lot more out there for you. You were a damn kid, you weren't even fully grown yet. How long are you gonna cling to a stubborn idea you came up with at a time you didn't even have pubic hair!"

Subaru straight-out informed Garfiel that the belief he stubbornly held, the creed which had kept his heart bound to Sanctuary, is imbecilic.

Garfiel: "-----"

Garfiel immediately opened his mouth to reply. But feeling something akin to a stab in his chest, no speech exited his throat.

He could not say anything. Nothing was coming out.

His head was blazing white. It isn't that he thought Subaru was correct. There is no possible way Garfiel could be wrong. The way of life he had adopted after knowing he was wrong, could not be wrong.

He must not be wrong.

And so, this man claiming Garfiel was wrong, must not be allowed to claim such a thing.

Garfiel: "Hah... Ahhhhhhh... Got it..."

Subaru: "..."

Garfiel: "I need to stop you. I ain't got any idea of anythin' yer sayin'. But it's makin' me feel sick. 'n so, I'm stoppin' you."

He must stop him. And the way to stop him was surely, the exact way the man had previously stated.

—So long as the man draws breath, this man could not possibly be stopped.

Garfiel: “Then... I’ll, kill you...”

Subaru: “Can you?”

Garfiel: “Buzz off— the method to do it was right here all along.”

If he would not stop unless killed, Garfiel would kill and stop him, assuredly. In this place, at this juncture, he would make that choice.

—Make the choice to entrust himself to the abhorrent, vile blood of the beast sleeping inside him.

Garfiel: “—Ooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooh!”

He held himself, all the blood in his body seething with incendiary heat.

The inferno felt as if his every exhale had been superheated to the point of being colored red. His cells squirmed, his muscles swelled, his mass exploded in size. His limbs grew thick as logs, his abdomen bloating to snap off his loincloth. Golden fur sprouted across his whole body, as his sharp fangs matured instantly into elongated sabers. His face protruded into a snout, the world changing color alongside the slitting of his pupils. His thoughts solder.

And the mind of the once-present Garfiel Tinsel drowned.

The exhilaration of transformation, and the feeling of his bestial instincts drowned out his rationality. Once everything’s done and he returned to himself, what would remain before him would amount to ravaged chunks of scattered gore. The final appearance of Natsuki Subaru.

He had not been able to stop him short of doing this. He had neither intent to lament, nor to repent for that.

People who lacked strength were bad. The weak could suggest nothing. That was all there was to it.

His consciousness was fading.

His bestial instincts screeched in jubilation, jaws opening to devour their miserable prey—

—The dimwitted animal's vision drowns beneath an eruption of ink-black fog.



Illustration from Volume 13, coloring by Xarlasar ([source](#))

Arc 4 Chapter 113 - None Can Lift the Quain Stone Alone

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 13, Chapter 7 “None Can Lift the Quain Stone Alone”, Part 2
(halfway)

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by SummaryAnon – [Complete](#), Page 180

His eyes wouldn't fully open. Blood was flowing through him so poorly his veins might as well be clogged. But the scarlet dripping from his nose and from his wounds showed no signs of dampening— was he or was he not wanting for blood? Bleeding some of it out might actually be perfect for his boiling brain.

With all the punches he had withstood, Subaru's recognition of the world was just a smidgen delayed as he shook his head.

It really felt he had been standing up solely for the purpose of getting punched again.

He did not mean to stand there doing nothing, but even supposing he punched or kicked back, his attacks would not connect. With every blow he sustained, he spat blood, suppressed his pain, made himself smile a cryptic smile which screamed “your attacks are entirely ineffective!” and stood back up. And repeated this.

This was not ineffective

Both the insides and outsides of his body groaned, the entirety of his guts practically burst and mashed together. The bones supporting his body conveyed the erroneous sensation of having crumbled to dust, and the fact all his limbs were still moving according to his will could only be described with the word “miracle”.

However, not a single one of these things resulted from a miracle.

Every time his consciousness seemed about to fall, about to falter, his fading awareness would be grabbed by the neck and dragged back to him in stern reprimand. From inside his pocket, crackles a hot, sharp pain— an excessively spartan policy which practically cooked his brain.

While it's something he had requested himself, his cheeks still twisted at how relentless it was. After all, these were tricks to keep himself from losing consciousness. Regardless, Garfiel possessed numerous other strategies to stop Subaru.

The fact that Subaru, despite recklessly managing to stand up, never sustained damage which would perfectly incapacitate him, was entirely due to Garfiel's own judgement. If he took a real hit from Garfiel in top form, then Subaru would be done in a flash. Just one hit would transform him into sloppy chunks of gore.

The exorbitant damage Garfiel had sustained from Otto and Ram's fight did contribute to why this had not happened so far. But Garfiel, who strained his wounded body to get here, was still in possession of fangs able to kill Subaru in one bite and claws able to shred him apart with one swing.

The fact this had not happened so far was due to Garfiel's judgement— he was unable to fatally injury another, no matter what his own condition is.

Ultimately, Garfiel was far too kind— that would be an accurate assessment of the situation.

The Ryuzus, Frederica, even Ram, all of them had appraised Garfiel accordingly. His usual crude disposition and boorish behavior made unimaginable how sensitive his heart truly was. Although he spoke of violence, internally, he constantly nurtured and focused his strength with the objective to protect.

He found someone unforgivable, someone liable to destroy Sanctuary. But even with such a person as his opponent, he could not make the decision to take their life.

Subaru: “———”

Subaru knew he was taking advantage of Garfiel's disposition and kindness.

Utilizing Garfiel's personality had been Subaru's principle for fighting him all along. With Garfiel as his opponent, too kind to give it his all, then Subaru was somewhat convicted he would not be killed.

But even said, Garfiel facing him despite his previous grievous wounds, and yet he was wiping the floor with Subaru. If Garfiel had been in peak condition, Subaru surely would not be getting away with so little. For that he felt grateful to Otto and Ram, who had endeavored for him while ignoring his plans.

—Was it possible they were dead?

Being that Garfiel's personality kept him from killing Subaru, it was inconceivable he would have killed Otto and Ram. Even if it had progressed that far, Garfiel's attitude would give it away. And most importantly, if Garfiel had killed Ram, then no reason existed for him to show up and stop Subaru in human form. To rationalize and remain in bestial shape would be natural.

Garfiel had not denied Subaru's statements about neglecting to kill them. That meant that the conclusion to Otto, Ram, and Garfiel's fight amounted to nothing more than a conclusion of the fight.

Garfiel: "—Ooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooh!"

Garfiel cradled himself as his body starts transforming.

His arms, his legs, enlarged not one but two times over, his torso's thickness and size shifting into something overpowering. His claws and fangs became sharp as blades while his face morphed from that of a human to that of a feline. Golden fur coated his bare skin. Four feet contacting the ground carried his great body.

—What had just materialized here, Subaru reflected in its slit-pupil eyes, was a golden tiger. He needed to kill Subaru to stop him.

After countless swings of his fists, Garfiel finally reached that conclusion. And so, to kill the Subaru that needed to be killed, Garfiel made his decision. He would call to the blood sleeping within him, to his bestial instincts, become a tiger and reap Subaru's life.

All while in the shape of a dimwitted animal. So he would end this without witnessing anything.

Subaru: "But that's where you are wrong, Garfiel."

His inability to kill his opponent, and inability to strike them down with his fists, amounted to kindness. Making the decision to protect Sanctuary, to protect himself and those around him, also amounted to kindness.

But running away to a place he would not witness his actions, all for the sake of killing of someone he was not able to kill, had nothing to do with kindness. It was Garfiel's weakness.

And Natsuki Subaru would not hesitate to take advantage of it.

Subaru: "Begging you, body of mine. Don't break down from this!"

Hostility filled the transfigured Garfiel's eyes, Subaru present in their reflection. His limbs bent, an omen that the beast would come charging to rip Subaru apart.

This is the sole juncture he has for decision. Subaru gritted his teeth once before focusing on the center of his body— on the gateway tied to the point just below his navel, and raised his voice.

Subaru: "—Shamaaaaaaaaaaaaaaac!!"

Garfiel: "———"

The very instant the tiger opens its mouth, the world answered to the fervid call. Ink-black fog erupted in the space between Subaru and the beast, drowning away the form of the towering creature. Moments before it got swallowed, an outstretched paw struck, but it did not reach anything before vanishing beneath the smoke.

Once the spreading dark abyss swallowed the beast, expanding confusion dragged the creature's existence into an end.

Subaru: "Uh, ah..."

The very instant he finished watching the events through, an impact like a blow to his head assaulted Subaru's skull.

The sharp pain of a drill boring into his cranium from both inside and outside made his vision strobe in crimson, with lights dancing all around. Unlike the dull pain of Garfiel's punches, this was an unsparing sharp pain, as if shaving away at his soul— an agony he manages to swallow down.

Overexertion of his gate, which he had been warned not to use. The Capital's greatest healer had cautioned that the possibility of never being able to use magic again was real. Betraying that advice, Subaru called upon it once more.

He felt his imperceptible gate burn. The foundations of this gateway within his center swayed tremendously, and somewhere far and distant and separate from his body, something was severed.

This pain of something violently, messily, being wrested away from him. Alongside a sense of loss, a sense that it will never be recovered, it brought Subaru's heart understanding.

Subaru: "Thank you."

A strand he had continuously relied upon was cut.

He did not mind. An option he supposedly lacked in the first place had merely been eliminated for good. Regardless, it was because of that power that he managed to get this far, and for that he was grateful. For this was farewell.

Subaru: "———"

He looked forward. His last cast of magic had failed to fully enshroud Garfiel's tremendous form. While crucially his head was covered by the smoke, the right flank of its gigantic body was peeking out. He put in his absolute best, and still managed only this.

He sighed out his nose. A clot of blood stuck there dislodged. He wiped it away rigorously with his sleeve, as he led his unsteady legs forward.

He reached for his pocket. Subaru felt something firm and was secretly yet intensely relieved that it had not broken over the course of this battle. Should this thing be gone, he didn't have a fuck of a chance.

Subaru: "———"

The inky fog was steadily beginning to thin. How many seconds had passed since he cast his magic? Ten? Five? Might even be shorter. He seriously had not a single speck of magical talent in him. But right now, he was grateful he could use it.

The tiger's right flank was visible. Captured in a world of obfuscation, body immobile. While the magic had been imperfect, it conversely robbed Subaru of any need to deliberate.

And so, there is no deliberation in his course. Right foot, left foot. Far too slow to be called running. But a laggard, momentum-driven sprint, nonetheless.

And there, once he had gotten close enough to touch this immense frame—

Subaru: "Get back down into my court, Garfiel."

—Into that thick shoulder, Subaru took the shining blue crystal from his pocket and pushed it, stabbing. Light spilled over.

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Subaru: "After your Contract with Emilia's broken, you are back to being a free Spirit... yeah?"

Puck: "Well, I suppose that's what it would be. But, even calling me free, I got plenty of power on my own. Your run-of-the-mill person wouldn't be able to provide the Mana to maintain me. And besides, no matter who it is, I have no urge to enter a Contract with anyone but Lia."

Subaru: "So that Mana to maintain you... Does it seriously have to be a lot?"

Puck: "Yup. For example's sake, Subaru, we'll pretend that you tried to contract me, and even borrowed power from the ambient mana... Hmmm, I suppose you'd dry up in say, a day."

Subaru: "Uh...? Sounds tighter than I thought. But is that enough for you to be able to fight?"

Puck: "We are talking about a day in which I'm not materialized. You'd just be carrying me around. If I materialized that would be, hmm... I guess it'd take five seconds before you are out. Want to try it?"

Subaru: "How about no. But man, seriously, what happened to that thing about me having affinity with Spirits?"

Puck: "So long as we are talking about these Spirits over here, then that claim is correct. But even if that wasn't what it meant... my situation comes with special circumstances. I seriously am a Spirit specially for Lia."

Subaru: "-----"

Puck: "The plan to employ me after my Contract's broken and freak out Lia is hitting some setbacks."

Subaru: "I wasn't asking you about this as a plan to shock or freak her out. But... are you kidding me? Guess my ideas were off, then."

Puck: "Sorry. And even if we pretend it would probably work without a hitch, there's also the problem of the Anchor... Actually, since we are here, we might be able to manage something about that."

Subaru: "Anchor... Something like the crystal hanging around Emilia's neck?"

Puck: "That one really is special. But fortunately, there should be something made of the same material around here, and we could at least figure something out if we borrow just a bit of that. But either way, even if I'm stuck inside a crystal, and remain being just stuck inside that crystal, there's still the problem of Mana..."

Subaru: "--So, something I wanna ask."

Puck: "Hm? Yes?"

Subaru: "Leaving aside whether it's a Contract, is it possible to have you inside a crystal if you agree to it? Let's say, as long as the Mana supply's there."

Puck: "That'd be correct. But, securing that Mana supply would be incredibly difficult. Because I'm literally draining the mana, in my case. Sucking and sucking, until you are incapacitated..."

Subaru: "-----"

Puck: "...Subaru?"

Subaru: "Say, Puck."

Puck: “Mhm?”

Subaru: “So those replacements you mentioned for the crystal, where are they?”

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—Stabbing into the tiger’s right shoulder, expelling a terrific light, was a blue crystal.

Neither polished nor sanded, the jewel’s sharp point dug into the animal’s skin, grabbing the creature’s vitality and siphoning it away.

Subaru: “—Ghh!”

Dazzled by the light, Subaru toppled backwards as if assaulted by forceful winds. He fell on his behind, retreating as he watched the scene before him, where the tiger swallowed in smog had yet to notice the changes to its own body.

That crystal, big enough to grasp in one’s hand, would voraciously drain the Mana of creatures it stabbed. Just keeping it stored in his pocket had exhausted Subaru incredibly. What would happen when that effect was applied directly to the body? The answer laid right in front of him.

Garfiel: “—Ah, aaaargh!?”

The smoke cleared. So did the visual obstruction from the fog, and the forced confusion from the spell.

By the time he was released from both of those constraints, the tiger— Garfiel had lost the majority of his animal flesh and was returning to his original shape as a young humanoid man.

His fur flaked away and fell to the ground, limbs once the width of many logs tied together returned to normal thickness. His fangs and claws shrank, his body cracking and creaking as it reverted to human form.

The one looking most baffled by this transfiguration was none other than Garfiel himself. His eyes shot open in shock at the loss of his bestial shape and return to his original body. He raised his arms, staring at his human hands with quivering, golden eyes.

Garfiel: “Th— Ridicu... what the hell...”

Subaru: “I did tell you, Garfiel— I don’t get in fights I can’t win.”

Garfiel’s head sprang back up to look at Subaru.

Subaru wipes off his rear as he moved to stand up, his face swollen but smiling insidiously nonetheless. Garfiel now understood the changes to his body, and the fact he remains severely wounded. He turned his head, only to notice the foreign object stabbing into his shoulder.

Garfiel: “The hell’s... this? No, this thing is...”

Subaru: “Pretty sure you recognize that light. Me and you should both know it.”

Garfiel: “Yer bastard, where’d you... get...”

Subaru: “It’s obvious— from Ryuzu Meyer’s crystal. It’s one of the jewels from the stock to keep it going.”

—The laboratory deep in the woods.

Ryuzu Meyer, who had become the core of the barrier to protect Sanctuary. The crystal which held her trapped and eternally crystallized depended on some fraction of the duplicates to maintain its functions.

At regular intervals, Ryuzu clones would exchange the driving mechanisms inside the glowing crystal’s lower base. And of course, those crystals were not infinite in quantity. The supply in Sanctuary would eventually run dry, and no longer work to maintain its faculties.

Subaru: “Which means they must be brought here regularly with food and stuff. Being one of Roswaal’s backers, there’s more than enough opportunity to pinch one of them, let’s put it like that.”

Garfiel: “But, just doin’ that... Just stabbin’ me, ain’t gonna, drain my strength like this... What goddamn, trick did ya put...”

Subaru: “Well... maybe there’s a preposterous and starving monster inside that crystal?”

His breath faltering, Garfiel struggled to speak. He reached for his shoulder, attempting to somehow pull the jewel out— But the blue crystal was basically rejecting Garfiel's fingers as it remained unyielding in his flesh.

Giving a deep sigh, Subaru let his body untense as he turned to look behind him. He looked up to where Emilia had been quietly looking down upon him. Subaru's situation must have appeared doomed, even to her.

Regardless, she never attempted to stop Subaru's battle. This girl who, when he fought battles while running off unreasonable stubbornness either of their sakes, had once attempted to stop him zealously.

Even Subaru could understand that there was something, which he could not quite assert as being trust, between them. That something between them, surely, was something which they had yet to put into either words or form.

For now though, the crystal had pinned Garfiel's actions to a stop.

Emilia must have noticed something, upon seeing that glow. She did not know what. But it was fine that she did not know, for now.

Subaru: "Witness me, Garfiel."

Garfiel: "Eh...?"

Subaru: "If you want to stop me, then do it by your own hands. Don't leave yourself to that blood inside you, where you can't tell what you are doing. You are the one who's making idiots of people."

He stepped forth. His body creaked, blood dripping without pause from somewhere.

His life was flowing out. But he possessed no intent to either stop or let himself be stopped.

Subaru: "You are trying to stop us. We will stop you— Emilia will challenge the Tomb. Sanctuary will be freed. We don't have time to sit around at stalemate."

Garfiel: "Jus' spoutin' whatever fuckin' bullshit ya like! Who asked! Who gave you permission! This place, just as it is, stayin' as it is, without any change, is fine!"

Subaru: “Not like it can possibly stay unchanged and stagnant forever. That’s something that centuries ago someone ought to have realized, before the place wound up like this.”

Garfiel: “There are people! Who don’t want it to change! Who want it to stay the same!”

Subaru: “I figure it would be fine if you could keep reigning as the place’s guardian eternally, keeping things entirely unchanged. But, y’see, there are things you cannot achieve alone, no matter how hard you try.”

Time, and the coming generations would both leave Garfiel behind, eventually. And ultimately, he would lose enough strength to not be able to keep protecting this unchanging Sanctuary.

Subaru: “Just like how we all ganged up to corner you, there’s going to be a time where you can’t manage it on your own. Any second now.”

Subaru walked, arriving before Garfiel.

Garfiel clutched the crystal in his shoulder, his breathing unsteady, but his eyes nevertheless strong as he glared at Subaru. Subaru reciprocated the glare head-on.

They both knew that merely slinging words at each other would not suffice. And so---

Subaru: “Stand down, Garfiel. Behold the power of numbers.”

Garfiel: “There had t’be other goddamn ways t’say that!”

Garfiel roared. A fist came swinging from below. But sluggishly. As the crystal was still draining his energy, barely any strength remained in Garfiel. Subaru tilted his head aside with plenty of time— And fails to move as intended, eating a fist to the face in the process, causing his vision to swim.

Garfiel: “Take a fuckin’ nap, ya bastard! Then my amazin’ self’s bringin’ that Tomb down! You ‘n the others, I’m keepin’ all of ya here ‘til yer dead!”

Subaru: “So that’s what you were planning, huh!?”

Subaru responded by stretching out his faltering legs and slamming his fist upwards. Unavoidable, the punch smashed into Garfiel’s face. For the first time during this whole fight, Subaru landed a clean hit.

Terrible posture, his body's core unsteady, his arm not even fully extended; it was a terrible excuse of a punch. He naturally could not expect the strike to be as powerful as he hoped, but against the present Garfiel, it was more than enough.

Garfiel: "—Guh, gah."

Now accompanying his bodily wounds, the Mana supporting his body was being leeched from his core. Garfiel was already close to being incapacitated to the point he could not fight any longer, and Subaru's strike would be the decisive blow to send him hurtling off. But—

Garfiel: "That ain't gonna work!"

Subaru: "Geh!"

Both of Garfiel's feet stomped the ground as hard as they could, his posture lowering as he spiked his elbow into Subaru's solar plexus. Subaru screamed, using his lowered head to strike Garfiel's forehead with a headbutt in reply. Both recoiled at the numb pain to their skulls, both sent out their fists as they right their heads, and both landed their hit.

With fists mutually driven into the other's cheek, blood began to flow from both of their noses. Subaru was situated at the limit for physical damage, while Garfiel was, mental factors included, sitting in critical territory.

The glow of the crystal in Garfiel's shoulder was steadily growing dimmer. That perhaps proved that Garfiel was nearly exhausted of Mana, or rather, proved the battle was nearing its conclusion.

Subaru: "—Guh!"

Garfiel: "Fuck are you dozin' off for!"

The instant he dropped his guard, the fist at his cheek flicked open, sending his face rebounding with a smack. For a moment, the strike sent his consciousness soaring off to elsewhere. He immediately gritted his teeth, hard, the pain of his cracked tooth as it shatters guiding him back to consciousness.

He could not rely on trickery any more to keep himself from falling unconscious. Now the crystal was contributing in a different form, in a fashion without any greater parallel. Subaru needed to withstand all the pain on his own.

Negligence. Conceit. Idiocy.

Subaru would always be weak and would never sincerely be the superior party in a fight.

Subaru: “And so... I can’t be slacking off!”

Garfiel: “Gah!”

He swung his left arm down to hook Garfiel by the neck, sending the two of them toppling to the ground. His body battered, Subaru grimaced in pain as he attempted to upright himself. When a different, new vicious pain speared across his left arm, pinned to the ground as it is.

He looked to find Garfiel’s fangs biting down on the upper portion of his arm.

Subaru: “Geeeh!”

Garfiel: “Ggggh—”

Subaru: “Aaah! Get off! That hurts, you stupid!”

Subaru punched Garfiel in the face to make him let go. His arm was squelched into freedom as the fangs released, but a limb pierced to the bone has no hope of moving. And his right arm—

Garfiel: “Gotcha!”

Subaru reached out his right arm in an attempt to reclaim his left, and it is at that time Garfiel grabbed his shoulder. While he may have lost the strength to throw a swing or a kick, he had yet to lose the strength to grasp. And so, constrictive force enough to shatter a boulder destroyed Subaru’s right shoulder, bones and everything.

A dull cracking resounded through the air alongside Subaru’s silent shrieks.

His upper left arm has been mutilated and his right shoulder has had its bones destroyed, both in a nonfunctional state. Both his arms robbed of their capabilities, Subaru's eyes shot open as Garfiel kicked him down.

Garfiel: "It's the end! Now there's nothin' y'can do! I should've done this from the start... turn ya into a floppin' fish!"

Seeing Subaru writhe on the ground, Garfiel's cheeks twisted in victorious jubilation. He got on his unsteady feet before turning his head to the sky, letting loose his voice. The howl of an animal, an hymn of triumph. Now all Subaru could do was to wait to be stepped on, finished off, and—

Subaru: "...How many times do I have to tell you, don't decide my end!"

The blow of the headbutt thrust up from below bashed Garfiel in the nose, sending his eyes spinning.

Subaru stood with his arms hanging limp. It's impossible. Ridiculous. This wasn't even a question of strength of will, but an issue that rested on an entirely different dimension.

Subaru: "My end, and your end... Neither are here yet."

Garfiel: "G—goddamn... Don't yer dare stand. Quit standing... I..."

Garfiel's face twisted in agony as he took a single step in retreat from the standing Subaru. Even though he was unable to use his arms and capable only of standing, it was as if Garfiel was scared of him.

Garfiel: "What's this persistence gonna do! The people here, every last one of 'em! Every single one's a hopeless dreg! The outside rejected 'em, and here's the only place they have! They go outside, and what! What happens!"

Subaru: "Go outside and be something. If you are going to be here to end peacefully, then do it. Neither one of those options are available here anymore."

No matter how much strength Garfiel flaunted, and no matter how hard he fought, it would not change the coming future.

Garfiel by himself could not hope to stop the threat the Great Rabbit presents. No matter how hard he tried, he would fail to save some people. And each time that count increased, he would lose his strength, until he would eventually be defeated in the face of insatiable hunger.

If Subaru could communicate that future to him, perhaps he could be encouraged into action at this juncture. But that would not mean that he would change his mind.

It would only be a temporary push. His heart would remain sealed inside Sanctuary. Once he knew the danger had passed, he would return here, still pretending the place was a paradise while he submerged into stagnation.

Ignoring the push at his back, ignoring the hands offered to him, disregarding all of it, Garfiel Tinsel would feign his mourning of his mother's death while unceasingly consoling himself.

Subaru: "Leave this place, Garfiel. This barrier you fear does not exist."

Garfiel: "There is a barrier! It's me! I'm an unfailing barrier, separatin' inside and outside! Me, 'n nanna, 'n the others! We all stopped still! It's already the end for us!"

They had given up once. The people of Sanctuary feared connection with the outside, retreated into their paradise, and had given up on contacting the world outside the forest. And so Garfiel was trying to protect that enclosed paradise. Asserted he would.

That was equivalent to letting their lives be completed as they were. Because of one person, going off doing things on his own.

Subaru: "Then we'll break that barrier... Right here and right now, us!"

Garfiel: "That guy! And Ram! They're bitin' the dust right now! And yer gonna be gettin' yer peace too soon enough! There's no «us» for you bastards! Here's the end for me and for all of ya!"

Subaru: "Do you think it's fucking smart to give up? It's damn obvious it's cooler not to! You think that when you give up on everything and stop, walking means the end for you? Just take a little rest and walk again! The opportunity for it visited you goddamn ages ago!"

The Trial which had resulted in him fearing the outside world. Garfiel had experienced that Trial, and Ryuzu and Frederica nevertheless loved him.

Frederica chose to step into that outside world, to create a place where the people of Sanctuary could live, once the barrier was someday broken.

She would have turned to look back, and offered Garfiel her hand. She would have seen Garfiel stopped still, and offered that he walk again. Of course. After all, Frederica was Garfiel's sister.

When a little brother cries themselves stuck, it's their big sis who would reach out for them.

Subaru: "You said Frederica left for the outside world and left you behind. But you are wrong. You are absolutely wrong, Garfiel. You are not bound to the barrier. If you wanted to follow her, you could have done so at any time. You are the one who neglected to!"

Garfiel: "—I..."

Subaru: "You are the one who drew away first, Garfiel! Then you cry and cry and cry about it being your sister's fault! You don't think it's fucking pathetic!?"

The pit of his chest burned. What on earth was he saying? He was starting to lose track of himself. Deep in his gut, in that very core, something dark wriggled.

The supernatural gateway beneath his navel, connecting Subaru to the outside world, had lost its function.

So then, right now, this thing deep inside this body, asserting its presence, was what, exactly?

Still unsure of his head, of his body, of this man before him, he screamed.

Subaru: "Any time! Any moment! When you want to act! When you want to change! The instant you think that marks the starting line!!"

Suffer failure, lose everything, wallow in resignation and stop, hug your knees and cower.

When you're despondent toward yourself, disappointed with others, despairing from feelings of loneliness by being abandoned by those precious to you, even if you feel burdened by all those, and even if you believe yourself to be worthless...

Subaru: "Raise your head again, walk the path in front of you. And how can anyone order you to give up on that!"

Give up! Relinquish! Surrender!

Idiocy. All of it, an insipid joke warranting no heed.

If there was someone hugging their knees, and you felt the whim to call out, you should support them.

Do your best! You can do it! I don't know what's up, but if you stand and keep running, you'll reach somewhere.

—His chest, burning.

Subaru: "Isn't that right, Garfiel!"

He called the name of the man before him, his eyes wavering feebly, his visage small.

—His guts, blazing.

Subaru: "Isn't that right, Emilia!"

He called of the name of the girl behind him, her gaze looking down at him, as she stood on the threshold between weakness and something else.

—His eyes, something spilling over.

Subaru: "Hey— Isn't that right, Rem!!"

His head raised, mouth open, eyes wide, he called the name of the person who gave him the motivation to stand.

He had been taught that giving up and coming to a stop should surely not mean the end.

Natsuki Subaru desired the power he was given that day reach every single person there was.

Subaru: “———”

A power which did not not belong to Subaru squirmed within his core, shrieking its birthing cry. Cheering at its own birth, and welcoming its own birth. With Natsuki Subaru as a medium, it again connects to the world.

Heat, spilling over. At the center of Subaru’s body, a conflagration burned.

It swirled in the space before Subaru, scarlet flowing out his bloodshot eyes, and takes form, tampering with the world.

Garfiel: “I——”

Garfiel soared.

He raised his claws to swing, bared his teeth to show, and was no longer using words, but actions to deny Subaru’s assertions.

Unable to spin words, unable to put his feelings to form, this was the only conceivable method. He knows not of anything else. And so Garfiel reached for Subaru with his claws.

The heat spilling from the bleeding Subaru congregated right in front of him, but Garfiel did not notice. Right in front of Subaru, there spawned a warp in space, an inconceivable fissure in the world, but Garfiel did not notice.

—He did not notice the overwhelming force extending from that fissure.

Well, that was only natural. He could not see it. Or rather, nobody except Subaru could see it. Because this thing, which only Subaru can negotiate, is Unseen Hand.

Subaru: “———”

The world looked as if it moved in slow motion. This sensation was far too familiar for Subaru. While on the brink of dying, or in the instant before sustaining a fatal wound, or when suffering punishment for voicing the taboo, this sensation was always accompanied by pain, and depressed him.

But unlike those times, this illusory sensation was presently here for Subaru's sake. He could see the oncoming Garfiel very clearly.

Pure hostility— But, it also carried the wisps of a child's tantrum.

Subaru focused his gaze on the tip of Garfiel's chin.

Somehow, he knew. Before he made it happen, he attained comprehension. All that was necessary was to fix his aim and unleash this thing he was restraining. That alone, and it would surely be accomplished.

—And so, Subaru did exactly that.

Garfiel: “———!?”

The unleashed power shouted in glee, sniping defenseless Garfiel from below. The outstretched torrent of force took the shape of a fist, extended to the shape of an arm, and slammed a punch into Garfiel's face midway through his leap, shooting him high skyward.

Garfiel: “...Wh—wha!?!?”

Struck by a completely unanticipated attack, Garfiel failed to catch himself as he slammed back to the ground. He tumbled to a stop, splayed out on the earth. Subaru understood that he had just fired the decisive blow. And simultaneously, an incredible load of something is wrested away from inside him.

Subaru: “Ugh, agh... Ahhhhhhh—”

He fell to his knees, his body folding as he vomited all he could. But not a single drop of blood or bile came out. Not a drop of scarlet or saliva, for nothing extraneous remained within him.

That was the sort of final strike it was, at the end of so much effort.

The torrent of power unraveled and dispersed immediately after sniping Garfiel. Its fountain likely remained inside Subaru even at that point, but he did not sense that he could draw on it again. Subaru lacked anything to forfeit further.

If he used that arm any more than he just has, he would need to sacrifice more. But, being that the fight was over, for the moment was not necessary—

Subaru: “Come on... you’re kidding.”

Garfiel: “—Don’t, under... estimate...”

Broken down, bordering on unconsciousness. His vision was white at its edges, so exhausted any blink could be his last. He had expended such incredible efforts, and still.

Garfiel Tinsel, with an outrageous nosebleed streaming down his face, was standing.

Subaru: “Seriously, just how tough are you...”

Garfiel: “If I ain’t, ain’t foldin’, it... Ain’t, ain’t over, endin’...”

Garfiel’s consciousness was halfway gone. His unfocused gaze appeared to look at Subaru while not looking at him at all. Tenacity alone was driving Garfiel to stand, rejecting that final push.

Almost surely, Subaru could shove him and that would topple Garfiel.

But the strength to enact that attack was equally lacking in Subaru. Never mind taking a hit, Subaru was ten seconds away from losing consciousness too.

They had both done their absolute best, having used up every power in their possession to reach this conclusion. This was true for Garfiel, but unmistakably for Subaru too; all of their strategies were done at this point.

If Otto and Ram had not worn Garfiel down, Subaru probably would not have been able to get this far.

The idea he could do something provided he had the blue crystal as his hidden ace had been naive. To help in maintaining consciousness, to debilitate Garfiel to the utmost. Even with both aspects, Subaru surely would not have managed it.

The blue crystal on Garfiel’s shoulder flickered.

It seemed to be encouragement and reproach towards Subaru, on the verge of sinking into failure. Unwittingly, he finds himself close to giving a wry smile.

Subaru, the crystal, Otto, Ram. All this power combined, and they still had not been able to beat Garfiel. He was, without a doubt, strong. Subaru would sincerely acknowledge that. And so---

Garfiel: "And now, yer..."

Subaru: "Don't... think bad of this, Garfiel. I did say we are breaking that barrier."

Garfiel: "There ain't nobody..."

With unsteady steps, Garfiel closed in on Subaru. His arm hung aloft, and at its tip, dirtied with blood, dull claws were present. Should they reach him, Subaru would reach his end.

Garfiel put the entirety of his focus into this attack.

And so he did not notice. The tremors, the noise, that was approaching.

---The final push, to secure Garfiel's defeat.

Garfiel: "O, ver!?"

???: "-----!!"

Drowning out his shout, the dignified roar of an ground dragon echoed. The charging black dragon rammed head-first into the undefended Garfiel, striking him in the side and sending him flying.

Garfiel: "---Guh!?"

Stricken with an impact that had literally carted him away, Garfiel shot off as easily as a kicked pebble, wide-eyed. He bounced once, twice, three times off the earth, kicking up dust plumes and caking himself in dirt before coming to lie face-down on the ground.

He does not twitch an inch. Seeing this, the author of that merciless final attack arches her head, roaring.

Subaru: "What do you think, Garfiel..."

At the side of Patrasche as she proclaims her victory, Subaru called out to the fallen Garfiel. In a voice so frail, it's questionable whether he heard it.

The key which decided this battle. What was it?

Well, that was simple. In a fight against strong Garfiel, weak Subaru did not fight alone. Meaning—

Subaru: “This... is the power of numbers.”

Garfiel: “There’s gotta be, other... goddamn, way to, say that...”

Motionless, Garfiel responds sourly to Subaru’s words. Subaru’s cheeks relax slightly in hearing it.

Subaru: “Okay then, it’s the accumulation of everyone’s feelings, forming bonds of victory.”

Garfiel: “Haa... it’s as they say, «none can lift the Quain Stone alone»...”

With that, Garfiel fell silent. Seeing that fact through, Subaru grasped their definite victory, before looking up at the sky.

Subaru: “Finally heard a saying that worked...”

With that satisfied statement, he abandoned all consciousness and allowed himself to fall.

Arc 4 Chapter 114 - Lies into Wishes

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 13, Chapter 7 “None Can Lift the Quain Stone Alone”, Part 3,
and Volume 14, Chapter 6 “Lies to Hope”, Parts 1-2 (different context)

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by SummaryAnon – [Complete](#), Page 196

Carried by the roar of a ground dragon, the battle’s end echoed throughout the skies of Sanctuary.

A jet-black dragon, which had rammed into the wounded Garfiel, had landed the decisive blow for the fight. This dragon, Patrasche, had run to the scene as if sharing a telepathic link with Subaru, and had beautifully given an unparalleled assist in the final stage of the combat.

Patrasche: “———!”

This was the second confrontation between Garfiel and Patrasche in Sanctuary.

On the day they arrived here, Patrasche, who had been pulling a dragon carriage, had gotten into combat with Garfiel when he arrived to repel the invaders, and suffered a doubtless defeat.

Of course, there was a boundary separating the two, one a warrior, the other a non-combatant. Patrasche could not be blamed for being made to eat dirt. Naturally, Subaru did not fault his steed either.

But Patrasche’s thoughts on it were an entirely different matter. She had failed to protect her master and felt disgraced. For a member of the proud Diana bloodline, this was dishonor that needed to be overturned. Being that Patrasche and Subaru could not communicate verbally, the swift arrival of this opportunity was not a topic they could discuss with mutually perfect comprehension.

And so, she demonstrated her thoughts by action. This dragon’s roar was devoted both to her master and to her ancestors.

Surely anyone would understand that, as the sound came mingled with accomplishment and satisfaction, and the dragon drew her snout close to Subaru, who was unconscious.

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Listening to Patrasche's roar in her restored honor, Emilia exhaled a deep sigh.

It felt like breathing had been forbidden. Or rather, the fight had been the kind any bystander would forget about breathing entirely.

Emilia, being told to Subaru to witness its conclusion, did not avert her eyes from the men's gruesome confrontation, while keenly perceiving her own powerlessness.

Subaru had spat blood, moaned in pain, broken down.

How many times did Emilia wish to call out and run over?

But every time Emilia's weak heart nearly wished to discard that, Subaru's words, "witness me", and his nigh-perfectly timed gaze stopped her.

Neither her action, nor her speech, would be forgiven. It frustrated her, and she found it hard to bear, but she must not allow herself to avert her gaze.

It's not that anyone told her.

But Emilia's heart quietly perceived that she absolutely must not do those things. She did not understand this feeling revolving around her chest, this feeling which had kept her stopped.

Subaru had exhibited incredible stubbornness, Garfiel had howled with such incredible ferocity, and the confrontation came to its end following the two men's sloppy fistfight— What was the reason for such a fight? Being an outsider to the situation, and a woman who struggled to understand male logic, Emilia was only able to grasp fragments of the situation.

But Subaru had demonstrated his perseverance and faith with this fight, enlisting much aid to defeat Garfiel.

And that fact did indeed cause an indescribable feeling to swell within Emilia's heart. Still driven by that feeling, Emilia recognized that the fight that had taken place between the pair was one worthy of commendation.

That meant the significance of their battle absolutely must not be tarnished. And so---

Emilia: "...Roswaal."

With a single blink of her eyes, Emilia abandoned her hesitation and turned to face forward. Her gaze was directed beyond Subaru and Garfiel toppled on the ground before her, reaching to the gaps in the trees yonder.

---There stands a warlock¹⁶¹, in silence.

Emilia: "It makes people uneasy if you are just quiet like that. They'll start to think you are up to something."

Roswaal: "Myyyyyyyyy goodness, that certainly does sting. Doing that after I came here, pushing my wounded body, for the sake of yooooooooourself and Subaru-kun..."

Emilia: "If those are your real intentions, then I wish I'd be more relaxed, but..."

Out from the bushes in front of Emilia, someone tall emerged--- Roswaal.

During several days, ever since their arrival in Sanctuary, Emilia had only seen him in bed. The fact he was outside and loitering around here made her somewhat wary.

Roswaal was basically Emilia's sponsor in the Royal Selection and her only ally, politically speaking. The one who brought Emilia out of the forest and presented her the path to the throne, and suggested that the villagers sleeping in ice could be saved, was also him.

And so, leaving his peculiarities aside, Emilia had never truly viewed Roswaal as hostile, scornful, or dangerous so far.

¹⁶¹ Not to be confused with Warlock. What's the difference, you say? One's a title for Hector, the other's just a descriptor. But just for curiosity's sake, the Japanese for both situations is the same (魔人).

But that was up until just a few seconds previously.

Emilia: “The Micro Spirits have been noisy and restless for a while now.”

Roswaal: “...HMMMMMMMMMMMMM.”

Emilia: “Everybody’s saying they sense something soooo menacing. And right now, even I can see it too.”

Her voice low and tense, Emilia slowly descended from the Tomb’s entrance down to the open square. Subaru’s face as he rested there was satisfied, while Garfiel’s was twisted in regret. Emilia placed herself at Patrasche’s side, as the dragon stood between Subaru and Garfiel, putting herself in position to protect the three of them should anything happen.

Protect the three— That must have been the one goal in her mind, considering the irregular vibe that was currently emanating from Roswaal.

A dense, abnormally thick concentration of Mana warped the atmosphere around Roswaal. Just how concentrated was the Mana inside this man? This was Roswaal L. Mathers, who commanded all six types of magic, known as the greatest magician in the country.

If this man were to detonate his magic to its greatest limit, just what miracles could happen?

Emilia: “———”

Feeling tipsy off the dense mana, Emilia swallowed her breath.

Patrasche moved to a place blocking Roswaal’s line of sight to Subaru, stretching out her neck as she growled intimidatingly at the warlock. She had also sensed a threat in Roswaal’s anomalous atmosphere. Seeing the two’s caution, Roswaal shrugged, his attitude entirely the same as always.

Roswaal: “How scary. I woouooooould prefer if you could abstain frooooooom looking at me like that. Aaaaaaaalthough, my nature is one ridiculously disfavored by animals, ground dragons included. Should the same apply for Spirits, that does explain why Beatrice won’t be cordial wiiiiiiiith me.”

Emilia: “Stop fooling around. And I’m certain she’s unhappy with you because of something else... I don’t know if it was always like that, though.”

Roswaal: “Noooooooooooo. A long time ago... A long time ago indeed, it waaaaaaaaasn’t like that. When there were no ground dragons, people would usually ride Grim Oxen Falos.”

Emilia: “When, there were no ground dragons...?”

Emilia’s brows furrowed. While she was not exactly the most knowledgeable on the topic, ground dragons were creatures firmly joined to everyday living, and the culture and history surrounding them, as well as their connection with humanity, has supposedly gone on for a long time.

What Roswaal must have meant is “in Lugunica”. Emilia’s studies were too lacking for her to pinpoint just when ground dragons started being densely used in Lugunica, though.

Roswaal exhaled a small sigh at Emilia’s confusion. Somehow, it gave off the feeling of pre-anticipated disappointment.

Roswaal: “Then you would not know either, Emilia-sama. Weeeeeell, I suppose you wouldn’t. While you may have inherited blood from the long-lived elves, your age only amounts to a century and a few years... Considering you have spent the most of that time asleep, surely you wouldn’t remember the world aaaaaaaaaaas it was then.”

Emilia: “...You are saying weird things, Roswaal. If we are going to talk about this, then you are way younger than me. Hm, but I lose if we mean time spent awake.”

The fact Emilia spent up to a century inside the ice, abandoned by the world and the passage of time, was history that Emilia found embarrassing. Even with the world at large considered, she should have been accounted as an elder among the populace. But she lacked the experience and knowledge fitting to her age. Including her inability to beat the Trial, her time in Sanctuary has made her recognize there are many areas in which she lacks— including this.

But Roswaal responded to Emilia’s worries with just a snort, laughing them off. The reaction was unanticipated, so Emilia’s brows shot up in surprise.

Emilia: “Wait, Roswaal. Why are you laughing like that?”

Roswaal: “—Please excuse me. It truly was noooooothing important. Merely reflecting that ignorance occasionally does create situations so humorous it’s sad.”

Emilia: “You mean, you are making fun of me. I can at least understand that much.”

Roswaal’s rather insolent statement led Emilia’s brows to rise, her wariness compounding. Strange Mana encircled Roswaal, and his attitude toward Emilia was different compared to how it had always been.

Emilia had never experienced clear spite from Roswaal before. The Roswaal that Emilia knew was someone who was always screwing around, often spoke mockingly, and told jokes that were just as stupid as Subaru and Puck’s, but like them he had never said anything disparaging towards Emilia.

Because Roswaal needed to cooperate with Emilia for the sake of his goals, and it was necessary to treat her as a partner who had to be placed superior position of Ruler.

Tracing the logic backwards, Roswaal did not see the merit in acting such with Emilia, presently. He had probably lost his temper with her and her constant inability to beat the Trial, and given up on her. And that was okay. Because if that were to be the situation, she could at least understand and agree with it.

But something else scared Emilia more than that, at this moment.

Emilia: “Roswaal. Since when were you watching Subaru and Garfiel fight?”

Roswaal: “—Since when, which is to say?”

Emilia: “I noticed your presence there... just a minute ago. When Subaru and Garfiel were hitting each other... Right after Subaru used Shamac.”

Taxing his ragged gate, Subaru had used magic for the who-knows-what’t time.

He strained the dregs of Mana he had and used magic as if mustering the absolute last of his power. It resulted in a rather ineffective spell, which soon dispersed.

Thinking back on it, that had been the exact moment where Emilia truly wanted to run over to Subaru. Subaru once strained the last of his power to cast Shamac in Emilia’s presence before, and it had ended in his overwhelming and unquestionable loss.

Surely no one would fault her for envisioning his image back then overlaid atop his image at that moment, and come close to interfering. But when Subaru jabbed his hidden ace, the crystal, into Garfiel and the odds shifted to fifty-fifty, an emotion other than panic sprouted in Emilia’s heart.

And having lost that pressing sense of urgency, Emilia noticed it for the first time— the irregular signs of someone watching the battle, just like her.

Emilia: “At first, I thought you were there to help Subaru in case he reached his limit. It looks like Ram and Otto-kun did something to try and stop Garfiel, so I wondered if you were here as reinforcement for Subaru too. But...”

Roswaal: “Yooooooooou are exactly correct, I indeed came here as reinforcement for Subaru-kun. That’s what I could say, but you wouldn’t beeeeeeeeeelieve me.”

Emilia: “Even without Puck, I can at least figure out Mana currents. You were watching the fight so you could intervene at any time... But the one you were aiming for was...”

Roswaal: “———”

Roswaal’s odd-colored eyes narrowed as he looked at Emilia.

His eyes had been narrowed like this while he was watching the fight. His magic at its peak and always ready to fire, his aim fixed on Subaru.

Emilia: “Answer me, Roswaal— What were you thinking to do to Subaru?”

Emilia faced her palm out toward Roswaal. Puck was not at her side. There was also some anxiety over her Mana control. The Micro Spirits were trying to warn Emilia, terrified of Roswaal and the ominous magic he uses. If she was unable to depend on them to help her entirely, then it was all up to herself.

Emilia: “Please, answer. If you don’t, I...”

Roswaal: “We are far past the point of asking question, and you are stiiiiiiiiiiiiill hesitant in your decisions. No end exists for your thoughtlessness. Or perhaps you place too much expectation in the goodwill of others? I believe you were recipient to malice only in your days thus far. How is it that you manage to be so incredibly exposed?”

Emilia: “—Hk.”

Roswaal overpowered Emilia's pleading words with unrestrained spite. His heterochromatic eyes hosted equal animosity, his being not conceding Emilia an inch. The same applied to the multiple forms of Mana churning chaotically inside him.

Matters were proceeding in a questionable direction. Emilia unwittingly reached for her chest, then being remembered of the absent familiar touch she would normally find there, and gritted her teeth.

Her weakness, unconsciously trying to entrust her worries to Puck, frustrated her. To obfuscate that weakness, Emilia increased the strength in her glare as she gazed at Roswaal.

Emilia: "You don't want to answer my question. Then, I won't— Eek."

—Hold back either, was how she meant to continue.

The instant she resolved herself, and began to build a concentration of mana, something bumped the side of her head. Surprised at the dishevelment of her silver hair, Emilia looked to her side, to see the snout of a ground dragon.

It's Patrasche. Her push, or really strike, being that it had been too forceful of a shove to be described otherwise, prompted Emilia's eyes to widen. The snout of the black dragon's elegant face once again butted into Emilia's forehead.

Emilia: "You..."

They could not speak with each other, but even still, it seemed like Patrasche was supporting her.

—Calm down. With composure, do what you ought to.

Feeling Patrasche was sternly telling her this, Emilia realized she had gotten fired up. She closed her eyes and, by the time she turned back to face Roswaal, her hand was no longer touching her chest.

Roswaal: "Truly... I have noooooooo good memories with ground dragons."

Seeing the change in Emilia's expression, Roswaal gave his irritated opinion of Patrasche. Patrasche's care had so effectively destroyed Roswaal's plans. Meaning that just then, Roswaal wished Emilia had used violence on him.

Emilia: "I don't know what you are thinking right now at all. If she hadn't stopped me just then, I know I would've... But, it's almost like you wanted me to."

Roswaal: "I will simply mention this, just in case. It's because I dooooo dislike being hurt."

Emilia: "...? But everyone dislikes that."

Emilia furrowed her brows. Roswaal's lips looked like they slackened sardonically. Emilia could not figure what that smile meant in the least.

Either way, she concludes brute force was not the option she should be picking here.

Emilia: "Tell me, Roswaal. It's obvious that you are beside yourself right now. How come you are... being desperate like this, tell me."

Roswaal: "...Desperate, you say. Hmm, goodness, my goodness, how surprising."

Emilia: "It's like you are abandoning everything, you could've been hit with magic and you didn't care... You could tell me it's not desperation, but I wouldn't believe you."

Emilia could understand that sort of destructive behavior in which you would grow sick of yourself, and let yourself act like an absolute insane wreck. The question was whether it would be directed inside, or outside. Emilia was the type to direct it inside. Perhaps Roswaal was the same.

Emilia: "If you are, then talk to me. I don't know what I can do for you, but I can help. I mean, up until now you've helped me with so many things, and..."

Roswaal: "—No. That is enough, Emilia-sama."

But Roswaal's frail voice rejects Emilia's offered hand.

He spoke with the most level voice he had spoken with thus far, his eyes numb as he looked down at Emilia. His clown makeup— beneath those cosmetics that seemed to be laughing, Emilia could tell he was suppressing his emotions to a painful extent. She gulped.

Roswaal's expression looked like he had given up on absolutely every single thing.

Emilia: “Enough... What do you mean?”

Roswaal: “It means just as it sounds like. I do not intend to have you understand my plots, as these two’s wounds and the Trial... and even the Royal Selection dooooooon’t matter for a second anymore— For already this world is an ending one.”

Emilia: “An ending world... Or, what’s this about it not mattering? The Royal Selection and the Trial don’t matter... Roswaal, what are you saying!?”

Emilia yelled in anger, unable to comprehend what Roswaal was saying.

Roswaal was bathing in suspiciousness. But the hollowness of his expression, and the Mana encircling his form, abound in such emptiness they would make anyone’s body tense up. Roswaal’s heart was presently hitting the peak of instability.

While Emilia did understand that, his claims were not something she could accept. Roswaal wanted to abandon everything important to Emilia, and abandon something that Subaru could not put into words.

Garfiel’s shouts had clearly illustrated what his stance was. He wanted to destroy the Tomb, and keep the Trial from existing any further. What did he seek by making Sanctuary’s barrier unbreakable? Probably an unchanging daily life, was Emilia’s conclusion.

And Emilia could sympathize with Garfiel’s stance.

Going without changes, being able to go unchanged. That path was a tranquil, comfortable path. If one could have a mundane life, spending your time in a peaceful place with those you cherish, then nobody could deny the desire to remain submerged in that environment.

But Subaru denied that desire at point-blank, demonstrated his stubbornness, and cast the concept aside.

Emilia’s stance was identical to Subaru’s own, for she was urging change to arrive at Sanctuary. But her reasoning was not as definite as Subaru’s, nor did she understand the feelings of Sanctuary’s people as thoroughly as he did.

This place was a necessary step along the path to achieve her goals, nothing more than a spot she had trampled upon. What would those around her think of the changes her interference brought? Being entirely focused on her own interior, Emilia had failed to ask this entirely obvious question.

The one who asked it had been Subaru, instead. Once again, she had made Subaru shoulder her burden, and overlooked everything. And this present had come to existence because she keenly realized that.

But, at this juncture, Roswaal was trying to discard the present Subaru's life-threatening gamble had wrought.

Emilia: "Roswaal... What are you trying to abandon? It's what... What started with you and me, right? And halfway through, you are... This is something that cannot be forgiven!"

Emilia snarled, for Roswaal's brows to react.

A wisp of strength returned to him as he covered his blue eye with his hand, his yellow eye trembling.

Roswaal: "It started with me and you? What are you talking about?"

Emilia: "Huh...?"

Roswaal: "It started with me and my Teacher— Assuredly, noooooooooot you. And so, allowing it to end should be within my own and my Teacher's liberty. As is logical."

Emilia: "You can't just do that!"

Even facing the incredible aura overpowering her, Emilia raised his voice. She glared at the clown, swinging her arms up.

Emilia: "So maybe it did start with you and this person... but the issue isn't just about you two anymore. It's not just my issue either. We dragged lots of people into it, caused problems for lots of people, and we kept going just like that! You can't just end it whenever you want!"

Roswaal: "The road is already leading towards its end and nothing more. So whaaaaaaaat would be inconvenient about letting it all end beeeeeeeefore we reach the end of the line? Indeed, it's hopeless for us... So we'll place our expectations in our next selves, and Subaru-kun."

Emilia: “In Subaru?”

Put expectations in Subaru, meaning what, exactly?

Emilia glanced at the fallen Subaru, renewing her awareness that Roswaal’s words must not be materialized to reality.

Of course.

Subaru had already done more than enough. If expectations were put in him, he would answer them excessively. No more should be sought from him than what he had already done.

When something is given, it naturally ought to be repaid.

Emilia: “How can you say that the path Subaru opened leads to the end? Subaru’s group all worked together to open a closed path. Isn’t that what this battle was?”

Roswaal: “To go either left or right will lead to a dead end. When faced with this crossroads, aaaaaaaaany struggle is in vain. For the entirety of the truly correct course is written here.”

Roswaal withdrew a black tome from his pocket. Seeing this unfamiliar thing, an impulse rose inside Emilia, clawing at her chest. Her eyes were open wide.

That book instilled in her a terribly bad feeling. It had no title nor cover-wrap, looked like an entirely mundane book, but, for some reason, just looking at the tome made Emilia feel oppressive pressure.

Emilia: “That book is...”

Roswaal: “A replica of the Book of Wisdom. Or perhaps it could be called a superior Gospel. To all except myself, its writing appears to be illegible scribbles. It is a text which divulges the correct path of, one that should be followed.”

Emilia: “History which should be followed... You mean like the Dragon Stone?”

Roswaal: “They follow the same principles should you trace back their roots, is what Teacher told me.”

Only when Roswaal spoke the word “Teacher” did emotion return to his eyes. His tone was one of envisioning someone darling, as if that simple two-syllable word carried emotion he could not fully suppress, diction which allowed for such supposition. It was natural for Roswaal to be capable of thinking of someone this way. Even though he was attempting to deem everything else he saw as worthless.

Emilia: “You mean, because we are going a different course than what that book says, you’ll ruin everything? But what will doing that accomplish? If we look for a different path, different from the book, which isn’t a dead end...”

Roswaal: “You are saying the exact same things as Subaru-kun. Is this another second-hand idea from him?”

Emilia: “—Hk!”

Roswaal laughed slightly. Feeling she had been struck by a star, Emilia’s throat caught. Her expression prompted Roswaal to give a bored sigh.

Roswaal: “Borrowed words, pre-prepared opinions. Even the idea you should challenge the Trial was something imposed upon you... Weeeeeeeell, I will not fault you. It was I and those around you who demanded you do it, not yourself. Words spoken with the knowledge that your empty, insignificant self can do nothing other than this... Subaru-kun encourages suuuuuuuch cruel things.”

Emilia: “Cruel things...”

Roswaal: “We’re talking about him, so ooooooof course he went without explaining the logical necessity of challenging the Trial, and merely gave you a motivating speech, yes? He pushed his complacency onto you and claimed that you could do it if you resolved yourself to. Indeed. llllll indeed I know. Aaaaaaaaafter all, he and I are ooooooof the same breed.”

Emilia: “You and Subaru are the same? What do you mean?”

Roswaal: “It means we impose our ideals upon the women we love.”

An assertion.

Roswaal closed one eye, gazing at Emilia with the yellow. His smile was strong as he threw statement upon statement at the silenced Emilia.

Roswaal: “What words did he use accost you? Nothing but statements pleasant to the ear, yes? He spoiled you, imposed ideals upon you, treated you so tenderly and carefully as if he were handling a fragile object. He did not consider for a second you are actually weak and brittle, that you are fearful and desire to flee, that you possess such a mundane breed of heart. He has not a shred of interest in the real you. The thing he’s infatuated with is a sparkling version of you living inside his head— Cooooooooorrec?”

Emilia: “———”

Roswaal: “I am also that way. With her, I only saw the ideal. You are wonderful, you are brilliant, there’s no one greater than you. That’s how I consoled her, what I kept telling her, focusing my love as if handling a work of glass... even though those things do not carry even the slightest of meaning.”

Speaking quickly, Roswaal averted his gaze, seemingly irritated.

Was he talking about Subaru, or was he discussing himself? Perhaps not even Roswaal himself could distinguish it clearly.

Overwhelmed by his momentum, Emilia took a small breath. So that she would be able to say what she had to say, even though Roswaal’s attitude intimidated her

Emilia: “...Is that all?”

Roswaal: “———”

Emilia: “Are those all the common points you think there are between you and Subaru?”

Roswaal looked suspiciously at Emilia. Doubt has rose within him. His neglect to say anything was obviously his answer to Emilia’s query. Which means yeah, she had to spell it out for him. She had to correct his idea.

Emilia: “If that’s all you were trying to say, then——”

Roswaal: “———”

Emilia: “—You and Subaru are nothing alike.”

Indeed, Subaru had spoken lines upon lines of idealism, and did not explain the significance of liberating Sanctuary to Emilia. But Subaru’s argument assuredly did not consist entirely of niceties and Emilia-focused lip-service.

Emilia: “—So, Subaru called me a pain in the ass of a woman.”

Roswaal: “—What?”

Emilia: “He said, who do I think I am, doing so much crap but causing so many problems. Always fussing over what’s already gone, stop giving others these empty expectations. Every word out your mouth is just insincere talk, you are lacking in everything, it’s unbearable to watch— Subaru said all of this for me.”

Roswaal: “———”

Emilia: “Subaru is paying proper attention to me. Now I’m thinking that I can’t keep showing him only my lame parts. You pretend you are looking ahead, while you are not really looking at anything at all. You are nothing like Subaru.”

If Natsuki Subaru were someone who would only envision an idealized image of Emilia, then surely she would still be hugging her knees inside the Tomb.

And Garfiel, too. If his opponent had not been Subaru, someone who knew more than just ideals but nonetheless opted to argue with idealism, then Garfiel would not have listened.

Subaru saw Emilia’s weakness, but still told her he loved her. Subaru knew Garfiel’s kindness, but still demanded he change.

No matter who they were, if they wished to stay stuck in one place, Subaru would run over and reprimand them.

You cannot stay here, you can do more, raise your head, look forward, swing up your fists, you don’t have time to be staying put.

—You are not allowed to stay standing still forever.



Illustration from Volume 14, coloring by Xarlasar ([source](#))

Roswaal: “Natsuki Subaru, made the correct choice in this Sanctuary...? That kind of ludicrous thing couldn’t... That would mean, the writ of this Book of Wisdom...”

Emilia: “My memories were revived, and I was anxious. Puck went away, and I was close to being crushed.”

The discrepancy between what he supposed, and the answer Subaru gave, confused Roswaal.

Emilia put her hand to her chest, not to feel for the presence there, but to feel the thumping of her heartbeat.

Emilia: “I thought that, once I remembered everything, I’d turn into somebody else. I thought that, once that happened, it’d wind up that the person I’ve been until now was wrong.”

Even now, inside her mind, there was a girl lost in memories. Once that girl attained a definite image, someone irreversible would appear. Once that happens, Emilia’s world would change completely.

Emilia feared that change, leaned toward rejecting it, but she knew this change was necessary. No matter what would change, that would not make the path she had walked thus far disappear. No matter how Emilia would change from hereon, and were she to become someone with a different origin, that would not make the feelings she held presently a mistake.

She could be facing a stalemate, she may have stopped still, but she would walk again. She would notice what direction seems forward, and proceed.

Emilia: “When I want to do something, when I want to change something, when that’s what I want to do— I have someone who will tell me it’s okay, and lead me forward. That’s what I learned.”

Roswaal: “That is a lie!”

Emilia: “It’s not a lie at all. Subaru told me he believes in me, and I want to believe in him. Though what he said might look like baseless nonsense. Though I might want to say it was a lie... I have to make it so that it isn’t a lie.”

She did not want to let the label of “liar who went around preaching about the insubstantial hopes there are in useless unsalvageable Emilia” fall onto Subaru.

Natsuki Subaru had asserted Emilia could do it. And presently, Emilia was making that statement a lie.

But if she broke through her shell, and achieved what she could do, his lie would not be a lie. That would be what people called “wishes”.

Emilia: “Turning lies into wishes, by doing these things I have to do now, is what I want to do.”

As Subaru had frantically, desperately taught her.

What rested inside Emilia, previously beyond her ability to put into form, finally takes shape as words.

She could not tell whether that was truly the correct answer. But what would change from something indefinite into something correct would be Emilia’s actions. And she would like to proceed without hesitating to do it, without indecision about it.

Roswaal: “—! Absurd!”

Roswaal’s face paled as he drew backwards. His usual composure had been cast away, and the emptiness he had until now, strangling out his voice with his expression one of despair, shivered in fear at Emilia’s answer.

He swung his arm, pointing at Emilia, his voice cracking as he shouted—

Roswaal: “Why, how! How did you wind up reaching that answer now, here!? How did Natsuki Subaru earlier communicate to you something I couldn’t tell Teacher!? Him, right now! At this stage! It’s not okay for him to achieve those feelings!”

Emilia: “I remember what I was afraid of. Right now, I’m in the middle of steeling myself to face it... What is it you are afraid of?”

Roswaal: “It’s obvious! Deviations from the writ! Going on without history proceeding as it is written here, and no longer being able to achieve our promised reunion! What else would I be!”

Emilia: “But it feels like that isn’t what you are having a problem with right now.”

Roswaal: “———!”

A fire of rage ignited in Roswaal's eyes. He had been voicing his wrath at the fact he could not sympathize with Subaru's mentality. Roswaal wanted Subaru to feel something which he had experienced in the past himself.

Most likely, what he said before about him and Subaru being the same breed had not been idle bantering, but what Roswaal was convinced should be the way of things. Perhaps he thought that himself and Subaru should follow down the same stream in how they confronted their lovers, and come to suffer the same wounds.

His unshakeable conviction was now close to crumbling. That was how Emilia perceived Roswaal's present turmoil.

Roswaal: "Aaaargh, what is happening! How is this happening to me, of all people!"

Roswaal put his hand to his mouth, disregarding his paint as it fell away, his cheeks twisting.

Roswaal: "Have I been dancing on strings since the moment of the bet? Garfiel's loss, and Emilia's recovery, was all of it calculated...? Did I err from the moment I started making plots in counter to a sage's ability to preclude¹⁶²...? But then, for what purpose am I..."

Emilia: "Roswaal?"

Emilia's presence flew out of Roswaal's awareness, as he absorbed himself in a dizzying storm of thought. What he was thinking about so frantically was probably how to correct a world deviated from his plans.

But no method to achieve such a thing existed in this world anymore.

Emilia did not know what kind of prophecies were written in his book. Roswaal had been cornered to such a degree, however. The deviation must have been incredible. So much you would have been already able to call this place a different world—

Roswaal: "—Ahh, I see."

¹⁶² Translation note from SummaryAnon: "Ability to preclude, more literally an ability to stop action from happening, an ability to make someone give up on their plans, or to deter".

Roswaal muttered. His voice had regained its intelligent tone, making Emilia anticipate that he has temporarily dealt with his discomposure. Through a logical conversation, they could find a point of compromise and—

Roswaal: “There’s nooooo need to worry about anything. After all, there’s the Contract. There was no puzzling to be had about whether or not he would reach legitimacy¹⁶³.”

Emilia: “What are you talking about? Roswaal, what is it...?”

Roswaal: “Nothing. It’s nothing at all, Emilia-sama. My deepest apologies for worrying and troubling you. You best proceed in the way that is desired of you, and that I expect of you.”

Bowing, Roswaal cast away his clownish demeanor as he flashed Emilia a smile.

Of course, Emilia could not simply agree with this. In a complete change from his previous hysteria, he was already back to his usual attitude. The fact that the previous disarray looked like considerably more genuine behavior was completely insane.

Emilia: “...Acting in a way you expect. What are you expecting from me?”

Roswaal: “It’s natural— That you challenge the Trial as you please, and that results be reached.”

However, Roswaal did not mention exactly who those results would favor. Perhaps he was desiring it no matter which way it goes, is the feeling Emilia had. She did not understand why would Roswaal desire that. Nor did she understand the reason behind his earlier cavalier attitude, nor why he swallowed it down and settled down. It was all just a sea of things she did not understand. But—

Emilia: “Right now, you... definitely won’t tell me about them, will you?”

Roswaal: “———”

Emilia: “It’s okay. I will not try to force you to say it. I know I’m not qualified to do that right now— But don’t get the idea that you can keep hiding it forever.”

¹⁶³ Translation note from SummaryAnon: “Could also be «no puzzling to be had about whether or not he would reach the legitimate X», where X is unspecified.”

Roswaal: “—Heartening, indeed. Knowing the truth, and now recovering yourself, we’ll see if you can stay true to your bluffs.”

He finished the dispute with a rather spiteful statement, but also a statement Emilia found to be a plea.

With that, Roswaal turned his back to her and walked. He was likely heading back to the lodgings where he was recuperating.

In the end, she had no idea why he came here and watched the fight. But the churning dense mass of Mana remained inside Roswaal’s body, as it longed for a miracle.

Roswaal: “Yes— Emilia-sama, a warning.”

Emilia: “Yes?”

Roswaal stopped, raising his finger. Emilia’s brows raised.

Roswaal smiled wryly at the fact that Emilia was one to display a far too undefended attitude when facing someone she had just finished having what effectively was an hostile conversation with.

Roswaal: “About Garfiel... It’s better not to underestimate how deep are the roots of hiiiiiiiiis nature. His obsession is not so shallow that simple defeat in a fistfight would change his mind.”

Emilia: “—Got it.”

Emilia accepted it. With that, Roswaal left the scene.

She saw him off, to realize that the only things remaining were Emilia’s breathing, and the breathing of the black dragon glaring at Roswaal’s retreating back until it vanished from view. And then the deep breathing of the two unconscious men.

Emilia: “Haaaaaaaaaaa...”

Emilia’s brows trembled as she let out a deep sigh. Noticing that Patrasche’s eyes had widened in response to this, Emilia smiled wryly.

Emilia: “No, it’s okay. It’s thanks to you that I kept my composure. But that was sooo tense. That could’ve turned into a fight with Roswaal.”

Patrasche: “———”

Emilia: “Mhm. I hate fighting when I don’t even know why we are fighting. And why was Roswaal being like that? Maybe Subaru would know.”

Emilia replied to Patrasche’s caring gaze as she kneeled beside the bloodstained Subaru, and gently lifted him up. Her fingers rubbed away the drying blood as she patted his swollen face. His expression twitched, as if feeling the tickle of the pain.

Emilia: “I need to heal them. Subaru and Garfiel both hate pain.”

Patrasche: “———”

Emilia: “Ah, it’s okay, you needn’t look so concerned. I’m a little worried about my control since Puck’s not here, but if it’s just some simple healing, I can have the Micro Spirits help.”

Emilia spoke to the surrounding Spirits, their dull glow shrouding her form as she enlisted their aid. The tender lights veiled Subaru and Garfiel both, their injuries beginning to mend. Subaru’s expression looked as if it had relaxed.

Emilia smiled ever so slightly, as she gently placed his head upon her lap.

How many times had she lent Subaru her lap, now? She had been given far too many things, so many she had no idea what to do to repay them.

Emilia: “When you wake up, there are really soooo many things I want to ask you.”

With that whisper, Emilia twined her finger into Subaru’s bangs. Subaru’s face scrunched up, and Emilia’s cheeks relaxed slightly.

—Ten minutes later, Otto emerged from the forest, Ram shouldered on his back, reconvening with them all.

Arc 4 Chapter 115 - You Are No Match for Your Childhood Friend

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 13, Chapter 8 “Love Letter”, Parts 1-2

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by SummaryAnon – [Complete](#), Page 211

He felt something precious shedding away inside him.

The sensation was unlike that of his gate, whose existence had reached its finality. Something entirely separate and different, squirmed within Subaru.

Was it hot? Cold? The fever it carried gave indication of neither.

Did it possess a shape? Was it devoid of one? Its nebulousness indicated not even that.

The dingy muck had coursed through Natsuki Subaru, cheering in joy for its release outside, to demonstrate its power and disperse.

But its vestiges remained, fluctuating through Subaru even now.

The abnormal sensation gave Subaru a feeling he could not put into words. This was not something he recognized, or something he had felt before. But he did possess both knowledge and understanding of its nature.

So while he was indeed questioning both “why” and “how”, he did not question “what” or “what for”.

There was no need to deliberate over the identity of this thing. Subaru would be best off questioning “why”, but presently his query would not reach anyone who could answer.

Meaning that Subaru only had only one thing to consider.

—Invisible Strike, Unseen Palm, Unnoticeable Blow.

All of them sounded either lame or rehashed, lacking in style.

A black hand which only Subaru was able to see. That which only Subaru could control, would be—

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Subaru: “The Imperceptible Will of the Gods ... We’ll call it Invisible Providence...”

???: “...Huh? What did you say?”

Squinting open his eyes, his consciousness still fuzzy, a fragment of his thoughts slipped out of his mouth.

On that instant, the silver-haired visage immediately in front of him opened its eyes wide.

After several blinks, Subaru recognized his return from the world of unconsciousness back to reality and only then noticed the connection between the soft sensation beneath his head and Emilia’s proximity.

Subaru: “Oh. I’m getting a lap pillow from Emilia-tan again.”

Emilia: “You are. What’s the count for me lending you my lap when you are unconscious now?”

Subaru: “Take some conditions into account and maybe three. Have to win a big bout to reach this paradise.”

Emilia: “Y—you are reeeeeeally not drowsy at all... Do you remember what happened before you fainted?”

Subaru: “Yeah, clearly. I’ll reminisce on it nice and slow, as we chat and I gaze at your face...”

Subaru joked around while he pushed aside the thoughts in his weighty head and got his ideas into order. He then remembered the shower of furious blows he sustained before fainting, and realizes, immediately putting his hands to his face, kneading his cheeks as he looked up at Emilia.

Subaru: “Crap. Actually, I think I got beat up pretty bad. Emilia-tan, am I okay? My face isn’t so messed up it makes you wanna not look at me?”

Emilia: “Don’t worry. It doesn’t look that weird.”

Subaru: “Spoken without a bit of malevolence!”

Emilia tilted her head in mystification. Subaru removed his hands from his cheeks, promptly checking the state of his joints. The area around his shoulders, lower body, and neck region felt vaguely numb. But most of his wounds are sealed and healed.

Emilia: “Subaru, it tickles if you move around on my lap too much.”

Subaru: “Ah, sorry. No! I wasn’t trying anything dirty with that! I mean I wasn’t but, how about I double check just to be sure?”

Emilia: “Don’t. I’m going to shove you off my lap if you keep saying this stuff. Stop being so saucy.”

Subaru: “Who still says saucy anymore?”

After responding to Emilia’s harsh gaze with a wry smile, Subaru righted himself up from her lap. While it did hurt to part with it, he couldn’t impose on her forever. His physical status, compared to his top form, was sitting at about sixty percent. Definitely not perfect, but he was thankful for Emilia’s healing.

Subaru: “Thanks for healing me. You managed to heal without Puck?”

Emilia: “My Contract with Puck might be broken, but my Contract with the Micro Spirits isn’t. And... I don’t know how this will sound, but it’s not like I can’t use magic.”

Subaru: “Really? My knowledge was that Magicians and Spiritual Arts Users have different structures in how they handle Mana... That you can’t have both.”

Those were lessons he had learned in the mansion from Puck and Roswaal. Magicians were only able to use magic proportionate to their internal store of mana, while Spiritual Arts Users needed to establish communication with a Spirit so they can utilize the inexhaustible ambient supply.

For that reason, Emilia’s ability to use magic surprised Subaru, differing from his perception.

Emilia lowered her gaze. Subaru’s brows furrowed at her strange reaction and she sighed silently.

Emilia: “I didn’t think I could either... But, I did mention that my memories are coming back. Part of them was knowledge on how to use magic... Which I think got sealed as well.”

Subaru: “Your memories sealed your ability to use magic?”

Emilia: “Yes.”

She nodded. Her failure to articulate was probably because she could not tell its true meaning. Subaru did not understand why her ability to use magic had been sealed in the recesses of her memory either. And his present information load was too scarce for speculation.

Either way, she had used her newly usable magic to heal Subaru.

Subaru: “Never mind the circumstances, if it meant you were able to heal me, it’s a huge help. How is everyone—”

—Else, is how he intended to continue, when he realized that it was not the time for him to be relaxing. He should have recognized this fact the moment he remembered why he fell unconscious. Subaru’s opponent, Garfiel, and Otto and Ram who had apparently opposed said Garfiel. Were they safe?

Subaru: “Don’t think the situation’s too risky, but I’m gonna go before they end up as forest fertilizer and help—”

???: “I appreciate the fact you are worried about me, but I would manage well without having to hear your imaginings about these worst-case scenarios.”

Subaru: “Huh?”

Forcing his wavering body to stand, Subaru started running away from the Tomb and into the forest, when the astonished voice of a young man stopped him in his tracks. He screeched to a halt and glanced behind him, to see someone sitting on the Tomb’s stone steps— Otto Suwen, with his hand raised.

Subaru: “Aaah, aaah!?”

Otto: “I’m so glad to see your surprise. I apologize for worrying you, but seeing as the worries go both ways, we’ll agree not to mention them, and...

Subaru: “Hi-yah!”

Otto: “Gah!?”

Having confirmed their mutual safety, a rather satisfied smile arose on Otto’s face— and Subaru charged. Riding the momentum, he leapt and acquainted Otto with his flying kick.

Stuck between the stairs and Subaru, Otto cried out.

Otto: “Ow! Ouch! The stairs are, grinding my head— Ow! M—my hair! I’m going bald! Wh—what on earth are you doing, Natsuki-san!?”

Subaru: “Shut it, stupid! Stop trying to be cool. What’s going on with this vibe where it’s like you did something big? Who told you to do anything more than buy time? You know how close my plans were to getting thrown out of the window because of that? But if you hadn’t helped, I don’t think I would’ve beat Garfiel, so I can’t say I’m not thankful!”

Otto: “I have no idea what you are even saying anymore!!”

Unable to give a sincere thanks, Subaru scuffled with Otto on the stairs while he speaks, when Otto finally kicked him away. Subaru rolled down the steps, landing on his backside before standing up.

Subaru: “Either way, glad you are safe. If you died, you’d make for an annoying visitant bedside.”

Otto: “I’d rather we leave these eccentric customs undiscussed. Or, actually, why didn’t those feelings of yours show up nicely at the start?”

Subaru: “Don’t let that praise get to your head, we are talking me here!”

Otto: “I am aware of that, yes!”

Otto put his hand to his brow, before noticing that Emilia had been quietly watching their exchange.

Otto: “Ah, Emilia-sama. I apologize for excluding you. Though it’s all Natsuki-san’s fault.”

Emilia: “Mhm, I was watching so I know. Don’t worry.”

Subaru: “No friends in sight... No, I mean, I’m drowning in friends and that’s why I’m in this situation—
Anyway, you being safe means Ram’s okay too?”

Emilia and Otto looked at each other and nodded. Subaru stuck his tongue out at them before inquiring them on safety of their unseen and final collaborator. Otto nodded once again—

Otto: “Considering her condition after I woke up and found her, I must say my blood froze... Fortunately however, her situation wasn’t as horrendous as it first looked. Although, she awoke while I was carrying her to our reunion, and did speak some rather potent venom.”

Subaru: “You have my sympathy, she really is harsh with people outside her circle. It’s impressive you managed to talk her into this. How’d you do it?”

Otto: “One of the terms for securing her cooperation would be that I do not tell you that.”

Otto put his hand to his mouth, indicating that he is not going to talk.

Subaru’s lips pursed, eager to say something, but he determined speech would not get Otto to bend, so he promptly abandoned any further questions. If some vaguely harsh questioning was enough to get him talking, then he wouldn’t have risked his life going along with Subaru’s practically-nonsense plots.

Stubborn, a nuisance, and a great friend.

Subaru: “Crap!”

Otto: “Ow! Why am I getting hit!?”

Subaru: “Just be quiet.”

Subaru shoved Otto’s shoulders, paying no heed to his complaints before turning to face Emilia. He found that Patrasche had appeared beside her at some unknown point, and was pressing her snout into Emilia’s silver hair, the two of them smiling.

Subaru: “What’s this? Since when’ve you been such good friends?”

Emilia: “Some things happened while you were sleeping... and she really helped me. She’s reeeeeeally amazing.”

Subaru: “Right? She’s my pride and my partner, no joke. Yeah, Patrasche?”

Subaru approached and reached out to stroke her back. But the dragon dodged away before his fingertips were able to touch her, avoiding his hand.

Subaru: “Ugh!?”

Patrasche: “———”

The swing of her tail struck Subaru in the ass, leaving him half in-tears from pain as he jumped. He looked at her, questioning and defiant, to see her sharp eyes had sharpened further and to find her growling in displeasure at him, with her neck stooped low.

Otto: “Would you like a translation?”

Subaru: “No, even I can figure this one out.”

Subaru replies to Otto’s considerations with a shake of his head. He gives a small sigh.

Subaru: “—It’s «don’t make me worry», isn’t it?”

Otto: “Additionally, «don’t get carried away, I’m not doing it again, imagine what it’s like for me». But with a «yes, fine you can come in» nuance amidst that anger.”

Subaru: “Seriously, what’s with your heroine power? Are you throwing your name into the heroine race?”

Subaru smiled wryly and reached out. This time his fingers did touch Patrasche’s tough hide. She closed her eyes, accepting it as if inevitable. Subaru’s gratitude for the tolerant dragon was unending. Patrasche’s assistance in the Garfiel fight, having provided the decisive blow, occurred as a factor of her incredible and unhesitating trust.

As always, flimsy Subaru needed to indebt himself to many people every time he wanted to scale any mountain. Would the day in which he would settle those debts ever come? He doubted it, but it had to do be done.

Subaru: “So what’s going on with that conquered and debt-producing mountain, Garfiel?”

Emilia: “Garfiel’s recovering, he’s over there. But it might be better not to interrupt.”

Subaru: “Interrupt?”

Subaru tilted his head, and Emilia puts her finger to her lips.

Emilia: “Ram’s looking after him right now, you see.”

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Ram: “Are you awake, Garf?”

What Garfiel saw once he woke up was the face of a familiar girl. This was someone he wanted to see upon waking, someone he did not want to see upon waking. It was a complicated feeling.

But he could not deny that his chest had begun to beat faintly faster. Garfiel snorted and—

Garfiel: “Yeah... I’m up.”

Ram: “I see. Then go ahead and move. This has gone for too long, my legs are numb.”

Garfiel: “Agh!”

On the instant they established communication, Garfiel was expelled from the soft touch, his head falling to the ground. He had not expected a kind reaction, but that kind of coldness did hurt, nonetheless. And even more so at a time his pride was already wounded, and his crush was the one being icy.

He rubbed his head and gazed bitterly at Ram. She sat on the grass with her legs folded, patting at the spot where Garfiel’s head had been resting, her thighs. She responded to Garfiel’s gaze with a displeased “What?”.

Garfiel: “It’s nothin’... Same as always, yer a lady without a scrap of kindness.”

Ram: “If the moment requires kindness and the recipient merits kindness, then of course I would be kind. The fact I’m not being kind right now means this isn’t one of those moments.”

Garfiel: "...My amazin' self has that merit?"

Ram: "It's completely clear what you want me to say. You must not be like Barusu, Garf. If you wish to know what a woman truly feels, devise a cleverer scheme."

Garfiel lowered his gaze, his head springing right back up because of Ram's poke to his forehead. That shock had hit just above the scar Garfiel always found himself touching. And accordingly, his fingers brushed across the scar on his brow as he sighed.

Garfiel: "Thinkin' back... yer the one who gave me this injury."

Ram: "—I had to act frantically to settle your shenanigans. Do you think I did something as drastic as knocking your face into the stone because I wanted to?"

Garfiel: "Feels th'same as today as ya were beatin' me down, ya were smilin' like crazy..."

Ram: "My life is not unlimited. If I'm merely doing something that I'm reluctant to do, smiling and convincing myself it's enjoyable is a better option. Desperate measures."

Garfiel: "How 'bout thinkin of the mental scars that leaves for th'guy who gets his head cracked open, oy!"

Ram's reply was a mere sigh, her expression looking even more bored.

Of course. She would never accept she was wrong, and her stubborn mentality was one to never bend. She was proud, noble, tough, and tenacious. That was why Garfiel admired her and desired her.

Garfiel: "...Do you have any wounds, Ram?"

Ram: "Who knows. I have had Emilia-sama mend the conspicuous injuries, but it might be impossible to remove all of them entirely. How are you going to take responsibility for them?"

Garfiel: "Make you my wife..."

Ram: "You'll fail. Think of a different method— And that was audacious of you, Garf, daring to abandon the losing side."

Garfiel: “———”

Ram’s harsh gaze silenced Garfiel. The anger in her eyes was condemnation of the fact he had been lenient right at the end of the battle. Garfiel neglected to finish off both Ram, defeated, and Otto, upside-down in the shrubs. Indeed, he had elected to let them live, possibly sully the glory of the fight.

But Garfiel was completely unable to brandish his claws at the unconscious girl. Even if he disregarded his feelings for her, even if he disregarded other different and varied factors, he surely would not have managed to do it.

After all, he lacked the brand of courage most important for a warrior.

Ram: “At the last minute... you avoided my last cast of magic. Impressive”

Garfiel: “...It’s not like I was tryin’ to. When I was beaten down ‘n started reversin’ my transformation, I got this menacin’ feelin’. Then my body moved quicker than my head. That’s all.”

The forest’s Mana had been assembled, and Ram cast the most advanced Wind Magic in existence. And, rather than think, Garfiel left everything to his survival instinct and evaded the blades of wind. The invisible gale passed his skin just a few millimeters away, and utilizing that sensation, he managed to flee from its range with rather artistic dodges, as the attack ravaged every tree in sight down to nothing.

Once he returned to the scene, he found Ram and Otto collapsed. Were Garfiel a true warrior, he would have boasted of his survival and taken their lives. But Garfiel could not do it, needing to surrender himself to his animal blood to take a life.

Garfiel: “I’m——”

Ram: “———”

——Not a warrior. Merely someone who puts on the airs of a warrior, spoke empty threats, a fake.

He had held himself to the stubborn belief that even a fake like him, provided he had the power, could subdue everything and protect those he wished to protect without taking any lives. But his ideas were largely invalidated. He believed he possessed enough strength to defeat even great groups of outsiders.

But, in reality, he had lost to merely three people and a ground dragon. And all those people were practically non-combatants, each with its own reason.

If a hostile warrior were to arrive at Sanctuary, they would have destroyed Garfiel easily. That was all he amounted to, after running his pompous mouth on being Sanctuary's barrier.

—He thought many things over, in that deficient head of his.

Throughout that battle, and even outside of battle, Garfiel had never stopped using his assuredly poor brain. What strategy would be the best? What action would best help everyone? Was there a way to do this without hurting anybody? And even if someone were to be hurt, it was fine if only him got injured.

All those days he had spent holding these beliefs and doing his best had been entirely superficial, and amounted to an act that only concealed his weakness.

Ram: "Garf."

Garfiel: "——"

Ram: "I'm going to give you a word of advice. Listen well."

Garfiel: "—Yeah."

Still looking down, Garfiel nodded. What words would Ram, his crush, shower upon him? Her usual statements were harsh, but she had probably never truly washed her hands of him.

Ram's personality was the kind to be soft to people inside her circle. And although their relationship was not without its faults, she and Garfiel had known each other for a long time, and she considered him as part of that count.

But her hostility was clear now. Probably, he was not included in that category anymore. Her imminent announcement would be Ram's parting with Garfiel in earnest, and—

Ram: "Garf, you are stupid, so thinking is utterly pointless. A waste of time. Otherwise said, a waste of life."

Garfiel: "...Eh?"

Ram: “You are the one who said it. Garf, when you acted without thinking, you dodged my magic. That is exactly the case. You may not have noticed it, but when you discard thinking you are considerably stronger in fights. Garf is strong, but the barefaced idiot is considerably stronger.”

Unable to comprehend what he was hearing, Garfiel’s eyes widened. While he expected her to find him useless, her statements were aiming somewhere entirely unanticipated.

Ram: “I don’t mean you should abandon all rationality and transform. In fact, I will mention your transformation makes you even weaker compared to when you’re thinking. You become a bigger target, and your weapons are slow. Stay in human form, focus on your opponent, and fight without thinking.”

Garfiel: “Th—th’hell’s this!? Since when was this the topic of—”

Ram: “This is important— Because now you are going to fight on many occasions as an ally to me and Emilia-sama.”

Garfiel: “———!!”

Emotion clogged Garfiel’s throat. His face flashed red, his sharp fangs clicking as he spoke.

Garfiel: “Buzz off! Ya play ‘round with me, make an enemy of me, crush my ideas, ‘n yer still forgivin’ me, ‘n tellin’ me to forgive ya!?”

Ram: “Don’t be stupid. I’m not forgiving you, I’m demanding you serve us. If we forgive you and our standings become equal, we will need to make requests to gain your cooperation. Stop being foolish. We are the victors and you are the loser. I don’t forgive you and so I am ordering you. Do you understand?”

Garfiel: “That’s all messed up!”

Garfiel bared his fangs as he stood up. His body swayed for an instant, but considering most his wounds had been healed, it was not a problem. Realizing the fact that he had been healed, further humiliation clawed at his heart.

Garfiel: “I accept I lost! Because I did! But that doesn’t mean I’m gonna back down! I lost, ya got me, got it! But my amazin’ self’s still alive ‘n kickin’! If ya were really gonna move things along without askin’

me, then what ya shouldda done was kill me! The second you didn't do that, it's the exact second yer cowardice's the same as mine!"

Ram: "That is carriage before ground dragon¹⁶⁴. If we let you die when we need your strength, that contradicts our goals."

Garfiel: "But, I—!!"

Ram: "Annoying sniveling!"

Before Garfiel could roar in anger, Ram got to her feet and howled. Her cerise eyes hosted fury as she glared at Garfiel.

Menacing. Overwhelmed, Garfiel ended up closing his mouth shut.

Ram: "You lost. You have lost. Then act like the loser you are and heed the commands of the victor. How wretched must you be in presence of a woman you like, flaunting your absurd and girlish temperament as a sore loser to your own satisfaction, Garf? The other party's punishment becomes your own the moment you lose. All you have changed is the aim of your idiotic barking."

Garfiel: "Uh... ah."

Her statements were spot-on. Garfiel could not manage a single word edgewise.

Before the fight, he had imposed certain issues onto other people. Now he had lost, and he was imposing his own weakness. It proved nothing had changed about his wretchedness, yelling at whatever he deemed weak. He had stopped yelling about the outside which he thought weak, and had started yelling about his own self, who he had to acknowledge as weak instead.

Garfiel: "But what am I meant t'do!? Laugh like a stupid idiot 'n stand in line with all of ya!? I can't do that! I accept I lost... But that doesn't mean I accept yer words as bein' right!"

That was not a dodge, but Garfiel's true thoughts. He acknowledged his loss. His opponents being numerous was an irrelevant matter. Were he to start venting why he had lost, he would never end.

¹⁶⁴ Not literal translation, but who doesn't like to localize expressions? Original is "cart before horse" (本末転倒).

The problem was nothing instilling in him firm conviction in Subaru's claims had sprouted in the depths of Garfiel's heart. Ultimately, the ideas he had been convinced of until this point remained unchanged, and even if someone demanded he fight alongside them, he could not simply nod in agreement.

Garfiel: "What am I meant to do, with this, half-way situation..."

Ram: "If you do not wish to remain half-hearted, then all you need to do is prove you are moving."

Garfiel: "...What?"

His breathing still ragged, Garfiel looked at Ram. Her expression had regained its usual composure as she faced Garfiel straight in the eye. In her eyes, he saw the reflection of his own feeble face. He would have preferred to look away, but Ram's gaze did not permit this of him.

Ram: "I do not know what Barusu said, but I can almost imagine it. And so, Garf... you should confirm it for yourself."

Garfiel: "Confirm it myself... confirm what?"

Ram: "Whether you are capable of changing, or whether you are still a petrified, whimpering child."

Garfiel finally recognized what she was telling him. And the instant he understood it, his heartbeat assaulted him, thumping at an unprecedented speed. Cold sweat streamed down his back, sticking to him, spreading inside him. His pulse grew wild, and a ringing was reverberating endlessly in his skull.

This was his trauma, its barbed chains constricting his heart, trauma great enough to bring these abnormalities all across his body.

He felt a chill and looked behind him. The Tomb loomed there, same as ever.

—Confirm. Something, in there.

Even supposing he went in, what could he confirm? What new answer did Ram expect him to find there?

Nothing would change. Nothing could change. But why, even knowing this, was Garfiel failing to assert "I won't go", and instead wavering between "I will" and "I won't"?

Garfiel: "...What'll I learn by goin' in?"

He was getting on board with the idea, completely so.

He did not believe anything would change, but he also desired to confirm it. He stiffened in terror, his heart wailing in rejection, but his soul howling.

He wanted to confirm. He needed to confirm. Confirm whether the bloody shrieks of the boy who had been blocking his path, whether the assertions of Natsuki Subaru, were correct. Confirm whether everything he had lived up to that point had been mistaken.

Ram: "You look resolved."

The chattering of his teeth, and the unrest of his heart, had calmed. All signs of his cold sweat were gone. Garfiel wordlessly turned to face Ram.

Garfiel could not tell what were the expectations she had put in him, with her stern words of encouragement. And perhaps Ram was not focusing on whether Garfiel would ally with them.

They had known each other for a long time. He was able to understand some things in vague terms.

What Ram sought was not for Garfiel to join them. What she sought, was that Garfiel would reach a conclusion on how to live his life. Everything else was secondary.

"She's a good lady, someone to be thankful for", thought Garfiel.

Ram: "Don't worry, Garf."

Perhaps unsettled by Garfiel's silence, a rare warmth peeked through in Ram's tone. She gave Garfiel's bare shoulders a light tap.

Ram: "If anything frightening enough to cry happens, I will comfort you— Our relationship goes back a long way, after all.

Arc 4 Chapter 116 - With Grandmother, With Mother, With Sister; As Grandson, As Son, As Brother

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 13, Chapter 8 “Love Letter”, Parts 3-5

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by SummaryAnon – [Complete](#), Page 223

Ram: “Apologies for interrupting when you are motivated, Emilia-sama, but Garf is entering the Tomb first.”

That was Ram’s first line after finishing her chat and returning to the group with Garfiel in tow. Upon hearing that, Subaru’s eyes widened, and Emilia and Otto were also surprised.

Subaru: “Garfiel’s doing the Trial... Seriously?”

Ram: “Most seriously of seriously. Hey, Garf?”

Ram nodded and glanced up to Garfiel, standing beside her. Their height difference was not that significant, but Garfiel was slightly taller than Ram regardless. He stuck his fingers in his bangs matted with dry blood, and averted his gaze so he would not enter the conversation.

However, Ram grabbed that unengaged ear of his and yanked it.

Ram: “Are you listening, Garf? What nerve you have, ignoring us.”

Garfiel: “Aagh! Daaaaaaa!?! Oy, Ram!? My amazin’ ear’s barely hangin’ on to my head right now! It’s seconds from comin’ off... it’s bleedin’!”

Ram: “It seems that introspection you had after that beatdown from us isn’t working. I’ll mention now that our side still has Emilia-sama left, who has not exhausted her stamina in the slightest. You do recognize what will happen if you rebel?”

Emilia: “I—I... wasn’t thinking to do anything violent...”

Everyone was drowning in wounds and sitting at the limit of exhaustion— except for Emilia, who had not participated in the fight and remained in top condition. They had just ended a battle where the whole point was to not get Emilia involved, and yet Ram’s backbone instantly using her to start making threats was terrifying.

Garfiel: “Yeah, yeah, got it. We start fightin’ again here and my amazin’ self ain’t gonna win. Divine Protection of Earth Spirits’s given me plenty of my strength back... but it ain’t enough for a fight.”

Subaru: “That’s a relief to hear. I’d seriously rather not get into any more fistfights with you. Thought I was gonna die. You’re second or third place in this month’s rankings.”

Otto: “Natsuki-san, just how many slaughters have you squeaked through? It’s scary.”

Subaru recollected on his fistfight with Garfiel and shivered. Otto envisioned the grisliness of the scene and shivered too.

This ranked in second or third place for his experiences in almost dying— but considering that he had also actually died, perhaps the danger he had faced here was not really that serious.

Garfiel: “...How am I the second or third?”

Subaru: “Well, that’s where you are. Second or third. If we go outside, there’ll be more of it.”

Garfiel: “Ha! Yer smooth talk ain’t gonna bait me. «Derderde lurks in the shadows of quick riches», as they say.”

Garfiel snorted away Subaru’s challenge, and traced his fingers over the scar on his forehead. His sharp gold eyes wondered towards the sight behind Subaru and the others— at the Tomb, looming.

Garfiel: “Persuasion, ‘n actual force... Still can’t believe ya used both. My amazin’ self’s makin’ a decision after lookin’ at it with my own eyes.”

Emilia: “What are you deciding?”

Emilia asked Garfiel, lowering her voice.

He looked at her, and she looked back at him head-on. That might have been the first time they had ever faced each other in earnest. Emilia was being the recipient of Garfiel's horrifically violent gaze, but even so, her amethyst eyes did not waver in the least.

Perhaps seeing something in the eyes of the other, both smiled. Garfiel clicked his fangs, while Emilia's fingers reached for her chest, before seemingly remembering something and stopping.

Seeing that, Garfiel reached for his left shoulder.

Garfiel: "Gh, haaa...!"

The blue crystal protruding from his shoulder came out with a dull noise. For a moment, blood ran down Garfiel's right shoulder, but he forced the flow to stop by tightening his muscles. Emilia's eyes widened at this action as Garfiel lightly cleaned the crystal and tossed it to her.

Emilia: "Ah, oh..."

Garfiel: "Just take it. It's probably right for you to be the one holdin' on to this thing."

Emilia promptly caught the crystal, looking at it while Garfiel spoke bluntly.

She accepted Garfiel's statements, while the brilliance of the crystal in her hands caused her to gulp. The jewel glowed dimly, strobing, almost as it seemed overjoyed Emilia had caught it.

Subaru crossed his arms as he watched on from aside. "Still the same even though he can't speak", he thought.

Emilia: "Thank you, Garfiel."

Garfiel: "I just chucked away somethin' annoyin' for me, that's all. No reason for ya t'thank me."

Garfiel looked up at the sky with no particular intention. Tangerine hues crept across the scene, and night would soon arrive. Before long, the Trial would be ready to start.

Garfiel: "—I'm gonna be checking. Whether my amazin' self is in the wrong, or you are."

Garfiel's shoulders sliced the wind as he turned around. His path led him towards the Tomb— that nightmarish place which had carved abhorrent memories into him in childhood.

After all this time, what would he see there this time?

Subaru: "Hey, Garfiel."

A call from behind stopped Garfiel, who was supposedly determined. He clicked his tongue and glanced behind him, to find Subaru is the one who had halted him, his hand raised.

Garfiel: "What?"

Subaru: "I mean, not trying to rain on your parade or anything. But seeing as there's still some time before the Trial starts..."

While entirely raining on Garfiel's parade, Subaru scratched his head. It looked like he was having difficulty saying something. Garfiel clicked his fangs to urge Subaru on, who then sighed to this encouragement.

Subaru: "At the very least, please change your clothes. You are in only a loincloth that's ready to fall off any second, there's a line for tawdry here and you've crossed it."

Barbarian style with the breeze tickling his privates.

A vein pulsed on Garfiel head. Ram sighed in astonishment.

Ram: "What a tawdry episode."

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—After getting dressed and entering the Tomb, Garfiel sensed he had met the conditions for the Trial.

The air was damp within the stone structure. A chilly breeze blew past, carrying the scent of dust, making Garfiel grimace. His nose was far too keen, and the stench from the enclosed chamber was an assault to his senses.

Garfiel: “Don’t wanna be stayin’ ‘round here too long.”

His mutter echoed down the corridor. Nothing replied.

He repeatedly felt firm ground beneath his feet, as he intruded deeper and deeper into the Tomb. Unknowingly, Garfiel noticed his pulse had accelerated.

He would challenge the Trial, and he would see its results by himself. He was ready for that. Yet, he was unable to calm down, because the memory of the Trial, for Garfiel, was one which evoked intense and irremovable dread.

His heart insisted that experiencing it again would make something change.

What the hell about Garfiel would change from witnessing that debacle again? He had never forgotten it for even an instant, in the first place. The vivid memory had been burned into his brain far too vividly.

What would be accomplished by seeing it again? Wouldn’t it reinforce that memory further?

Garfiel: “...Pathetic. I’m here because that’s what I wanna check.”

Garfiel mocked himself as he came up with untenable justifications, for his intent to flee. He could agree with Ram’s scolding and derision of him and his girlishness. He had never wanted to know or to realize he was such a cowardly man.

—What would he do if he were the kind of man who would submit himself to frailty and girlishness?

Garfiel: “———”

His feet stopped atop the stone-paved path. He focused his attention on the ground below him. A warm wave of power coursed up from his feet, the gift of the earth to Garfiel and his Divine Protection of Earth Spirits. He may have been wounded, brutalized, and exhausted, but merely contacting the ground was enough to restore Garfiel’s body, his strength building up.

Never mind his state instants after being beaten, now he had had a short rest, he was at forty percent of his top capacity. He should have been capable of destroying the Tomb if he wanted to.

And Subaru and Ram and the others would not have been able to stop Garfiel's destruction. It would utterly eliminate the point of their spirited efforts towards defeating Garfiel. He was able to eliminate the point, right now. Had they been so stupid that they had not considered that?

Garfiel: "Fuckin'..."

Of course they had. Emilia was probably ignorant to the concept of doubting people, and Otto was probably missing a few important screws, but never mind them. Subaru and Ram, calculating as they were, would surely not have overlooked the possibility.

They were thinking that even if Garfiel were to regain his strength, he would not destroy the Tomb. Did they think he was too cowardly to do it, or did they just trust him? Garfiel could tell which option was it.

Would the solution to that arrive after he defeated the Trial too?

Garfiel: "...Stupid."

With that, Garfiel resumed walking. Thinking about complicated stuff was not his specialty. His poorness at using his head remained the same, both in his daily life and during battle. He frantically worked his brain regardless because someone, long ago, had told him to.

Ram: "Think more while you are fighting, Garf. It'd make me happy if you did."

Garfiel: "—Eh."

He remembered who had told him to think while living. Which was why he had so earnestly, with silly sincerity, remained engrossed to the idea.

The exact person who had told Garfiel to think while fighting had ended up informing him he was better at fighting while neglecting to think. That was crossing the line for absurdity.

Garfiel: "That's bullshit, oy... Huh?"

A smile welled up inside him. Just when he attempted to stifle the smile dead, Garfiel noticed the end of the corridor.

A rectangular space welcomed him. The Trial room.

Pale ghostly lights phased the chamber in from darkness. Garfiel stepped inside, his stress somewhat calmed, and looked at the stone door at the back of the room. That door would open after the three Trials were cleared. He did not know if that was the truth, though, as he had never seen it open before. Nothing gave any indication of what was inside, either.

If he remained here, standing still and waiting, the Trial would start.

Garfiel: “—Eh?”

Garfiel crossed his arms, bored as he glanced around the chamber, and his brows rose. A sense of incongruity about that room sneaked into Garfiel’s nocturnal vision. He strained his eyes in an attempt to confirm exactly what it was, and—

???: “—*First, you must face your past.*”

A voice.

Instantaneously, his vision wavered, his consciousness blurring. The past was here.

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???: “I didn’t think at all that you’d be coming here again— It makes me feel very happy.”

Once his consciousness awakened, Garfiel realized he was standing in a forest.

He turned his head, to see the sight of a familiar woods— but compared to the scenery Garfiel knew, those woodlands were somewhat younger. Garfiel was able to easily notice a few years’ difference, being that it was a place he interacted with daily.

It was the past.

And he was in a dream, challenging the Trial.

After smoothly accepting these facts, Garfiel checked his current state. His limbs were there. Everything from his neck up, eyes and nose and ears existed without an issue. He opened his mouth and bit down hard, for his fangs to click like high-pitched blades.

He was fine, without problems. Actually, it felt like the injuries he had sustained before entering the Tomb had been healed.

???: “Your injuries from reality aren’t carrying over because this place only exists in your mind. If you suffered a wound serious enough to influence your mind, then it would not heal even in the dream. This one’s already been proved, for example if someone missing an arm in real life was invited to this world, their missing arm would not heal and...”

Garfiel: “Shut it with yer long-winded blabberin’. Can’t ya tell I’m ignorin’ ya?”

???: “Indeed I can. But even so I just have to speak with you. I’d sort of like it if you could respect these feelings of delight I have for our reunion after such a long time.”

A woman with a doll-like smile stood opposite to Garfiel. She was a woman of pure white hair and skin, dressed from top to bottom with clothing resembling a black funeral dress. Her smile was alluring enough to enchant any man, but facing her was enough to tell that it was completely empty.

That appearance was yet another thing which had not changed an inch from what he remembered.

Garfiel: “My amazin’ self’s grown up, but you haven’t changed a bit.”

Girl: “Because I am very unfortunately deceased. Dead, with only my soul stuck in the world. No matter how many years pass, it is not the same for me as it is for the living. This is a pretty sentimental topic, isn’t it? It’s not really like you.”

Garfiel: “«Like me», now those are words only people who know me real well got any business sayin’. Our meetin’ happened ages ago ‘n we only did it once. It’s not like we talked ‘bout anythin’ important either.”

Girl: “Perhaps that’s exactly how I look to you. But I have to wonder if that means the time I’ve spent looking at you has been equal.”

Garfiel: “—Tch.”

He knew he couldn't outwit her in conversation. While withstanding the urge to click his tongue, Garfiel glared at the Witch standing there without a speck of ill will on her face— Echidna.

Perhaps acting as an inspector for the Trial, Echidna had accompanied Garfiel like this on the previous time he had seen the past as well. Not out of any human concern for him as the Trial brutalized his heart, but to make sure that she did not miss the events unfolding, out of a gross kind of curiosity.

Losing will to speak with her any further, Garfiel looked at the forest. If this reproduction of the past had already started, then it was only a matter of time until the actors arrived.

Garfiel did not have the slightest intention to delight this Witch that was delighted with mere conversation.

Echidna: “So cold.”

Echidna accepted even this attitude of Garfiel as something pleasant, as she took her place beside him, stroking her white hair.

While he was watching her from aside, the change happened.

Garfiel: “———”

Faced with a scene he supposedly had known would be coming, Garfiel swallowed his breath.

The edge of the forest, or rather, the dividing line for the barrier which delineated Sanctuary's inside and outside. Just being around the barrier was enough for those trapped within to nearly go unconscious and experience the unpleasant feeling of having their very existence disturbed.

Near the boundaries of this barrier, four silhouettes appeared. One was Ryuzu with her long pink hair, her appearance identical to her present one. Another was a girl approximately ten-years-old, with beautiful, silky blonde hair— Frederica.

And standing opposite to Ryuzu and Frederica was a woman, her blonde hair tied in a ponytail, her face gentle. In her hands she cradled an infant, a blond child, with nasty-looking eyes.



Garfiel: “Ah... M—Mom...”

The instant he sighted the woman and recognized who she is holding, a feeble sound escaped his lips. But his call for his mother did not reach any of the four.

—As was natural. Nobody could ever interfere with the past.

Echidna: “Even if you try to reach out, you will not touch her. Nothing you say will make her smile back. I know it sounds ridiculous coming from me, but I sympathize with how you are being forced to watch something cruel.”

The Witch’s sentiments, which made him want to shout, “Don’t you goddamn talk!”.

But the eyes of the Witch as she watched Garfiel, his face twisted in anguish, hosted no malice. This scene was not something the Witch had prepared with malicious intentions.

How would the challenger’s regrets manifest, how would the challenger face them, and what would be the outcome of it all? This natural disaster sought nothing but these results.

Garfiel: “———”

Garfiel trembled. The four were having a conversation.

Their statements, their words, the tone of their voices, none of that was reaching Garfiel. They were opening their mouths, making sound. But despite travelling through the air and vibrating against Garfiel’s eardrums, no definite meaning could be understood.

Anguish arose on Ryuzu’s face. Frederica bit her lip in an attempt to keep herself from crying. Their mother looked worried, while Garfiel in her arms smiled happily.

This painful scene was not accompanied by sound, because it was Garfiel’s memory.

Young Garfiel had not stored the content of this conversation in his memory. And so, the words they were speaking did not reach present Garfiel.

But this memory is one that had been trapped by his heart. The scene had been reproduced, the performance playing on as if it had the objective to rile him up.

Echidna: “I wonder what they could be saying. Can you figure anything?”

Garfiel: “Stop talkin’ to me— Yer just gonna give some stupid answer anyway.”

Considering what would happen after that, he could figure out what they were saying. His mother was attempting to leave to the outside world, while Ryuzu and Frederica were trying to convince her to stay. Young Garfiel was unable to participate in the conversation, merely being held by his mom and basking in that joy.

Garfiel: “—Gaaaah!”

An unbearable urge rose within Garfiel, leading him to step forth. Echidna’s brows rose as Garfiel lumbered over to the four. He stood right beside them, but neither of them noticed him. He gazed straight at his sister, shorter than him, Ryuzu, unchanged, and himself and his mother.

Cradled by his mother, young Garfiel smiled guilelessly. It pissed him off. That guy did not know what would be coming next, he was not even qualified to participate in the conversation to convince his mother to stay, just smiling there.

How to quantify the regret and despair that had come of the fact he merely sat there, smiling?

Garfiel: “Aagh! Gaaah! Aaaaaaghhhhh!!”

He swung his arm up, his claws ripping through the air. He wanted to stab his claws into the infant’s happy face and overwrite it with despair. He wanted to make him know how imbecilic his decision was.

But his claws passed through the infant’s face, and through the arms of his mother as she cradles him.

He could stomp the ground and use his Divine Protection to try and send them flying, but nothing would result. The swings of his arms grew larger, the phantom of his mother was wrapped up in this attempted destruction, but no change had occurred at all.

Garfiel: “Why! Am I! Bein’ shown this shit!!”

He moved his arm up fruitlessly and struck the ground. But this ruin did not transmit to the world of memory, which remained sternly as it was before.

Unable to vent his anger or make the past disappear, his voice shaking, Garfiel turned around and bared his fangs at the Witch.

Garfiel: "It's the same! It ain't changed at all! Nothing's changing 'bout how mom didn't stay, or 'bout what happened to her after! Are you satisfied now, eh!?"

Echidna: "You are free to messily throw attacks around however you want, but don't you think it's slightly extraordinarily selfish to blame me for this? It's definitely not a mistake that the past is unfurling because of what I intended... But you are the one who, knowing what this place was, came back here. If you were anticipating for something to change, then the one you should reprimand for its failure to change isn't me. It's you."

Garfiel: "Me?"

Echidna: "Indeed. This place has not changed because you have not changed. You cannot accept the past differently from before because you cannot accept change in yourself. If you accept yourself to change, or elect not to change, then you will be capable of overcoming the Trial. And actually, there was a boy who elected for change, and did overcome his past."

Garfiel could not manage a single word in response as Echidna told him of a previous conqueror.

It was easy for him to disregard it as just Echidna pulling the wool over his eyes. But if that was not the case, then— the moment he thought of it, Garfiel knew fear.

Someone had overcome their past before.

The Sanctuary has not been freed. This person who overcame their past had not managed to conquer the following Trials. But even still, presuming they had overcome their past—

Garfiel: "N—no... ya can't trick me! Ya need to have demi-human blood to be qualified to challenge the Trial! It ain't possible anyone thinner than a half-blood that other than me or sis has come to Sanctuary before! Meanin' anyone qualified's still in Sanctuary! And this guy who took the Trial and beat their past doesn't..."

—Exist. Garfiel hesitated on the final word of his assertion.

The Witch's provocations messed with him, and just when he came close to doubting his own thoughts, the facts to refute her came flying at him. But was he truly correct?

The Witch smiled somewhat happily. She was not welcoming the detection of her lies, nor was she welcoming Garfiel's counterargument. That expression was one of waiting for something that would tickle her curiosity more intensely.

Echidna: "This guy who beat it doesn't what?"

From the bare-faced tone of her question and from her attitude, Garfiel sensed it. Echidna was looking for something. Waiting to see whether, from the information that Garfiel himself had presented, he would or would not reach the solution.

And then Garfiel realizes. Just who the Witch, who Echidna, was talking about.

Garfiel: "No goddamn way..."

Garfiel had spoken of the Qualification to challenge the Tomb. But there was an exception.

The Witch had not stated this directly, and so it was entirely Garfiel's speculation. But most likely, being an Apostle to the Witch of Greed qualified someone to challenge the Trial simultaneously. Garfiel knew only one person to whom this might have applied to. And had he not told Garfiel before about it already?

—I have taken the Trial, and seen my past.

Garfiel: "But, he said he couldn't overcome the past, he said himself he couldn't overcome the Trial..."

Echidna: "Don't you think saying those things would avoid unneeded conflict? Or that unwanted things would happen if people knew he overcame the Trial, maybe?"

Garfiel: "Shut it, I ain't talkin' t'you. Don't butt in!"

Echidna's words confused Garfiel's brain, his thoughts in turmoil. It was correct to acknowledge that he, Natsuki Subaru, had challenged the Trial. He knew the Trial meant facing the past long before Garfiel had mentioned anything.

Garfiel recollected on Subaru back at the time he had said he failed to overcome it. Garfiel had been so shocked to learn Subaru possessed the Qualifications that he had inadvertently ended the conversation before asking what he really should have asked, but—

Garfiel: “—Hk.”

Subaru's expression back then had not been the face of a man battered by his unconquerable past.

He did look frustrated for failing to achieve something, but that had not been the look of a man harboring a personal problem. That look was one which Garfiel had gotten to witness every day, reflected on the water's surface as he went to bathe.

Subaru's bearing as he attacked Garfiel did not carry the visage, nor the voice, nor the assertions of a man who had been stalled by his past.

Garfiel: “He... overcame, his past? You can overcome your past?”

Echidna: “Just for hypothesis, supposing a scene in which he gave you some kind of pompous lecture really happened, wouldn't it make sense something made him capable of preaching such a thing?”

Garfiel's hazy mind thought back on his exchange of fists with Subaru.

Subaru and Garfiel both had been hitting their limits for staying conscious. He could not remember the entirety of what Subaru yelled back then. No, he could not give up. Right here, right now, he needed to remember those words and question himself.

What had he been told? What had been yelled at him?

His past, his stagnation, his immobility, his barrier, his Sanctuary, his family.

What would happen to the hopeless, to those who had stopped moving? Hadn't he said that Garfiel was free to start something as long as he wanted to start?

???: “—Are you sure you want to go?”

Suddenly, a familiar voice hit Garfiel's ear.

But that was a voice which should not be audible. Because that was not the voice of someone who was able to interfere with Garfiel here, and not the voice of someone Garfiel was able to interfere with here.

???: “Yes, I am leaving. I’m sorry for the inconvenience to you, Ryuzu-sama.”

Ryuzu: “Ya don’t have to worry about that. The problem’s how the kids are gonna feel.”

The voices were the familiar ones of his family, and the unfamiliar ones of his family. The sounds matched Ryuzu’s movements and her sour expression, and the movements of his mother who was facing her.

For the first time in his life, Garfiel was hearing his mother’s voice.

Garfiel: “———”

He swallowed his breath as the scene robs his attention. His mother was gazing down lovingly at Garfiel in her arms, rocking him gently. Frederica grasped the hem of their mother’s skirt as she looked up at her, straining her voice.

Frederica: “M—Mother... I—I... I...”

Mother: “I’m sorry, Fuu. I know how it’s going to worry you.”

Frederica: “That’s okay. I will be fine. But, poor Garf...”

Mother: “Should I take him with me? But your mommy is clumsy. I’m sure he’d go through bad experiences. Fuu, you are my child, yet you are so dependable, so please look after him.”

Frederica, although sad, gave her goodbyes to their mother.

Garfiel did not know his sister had agreed to their mother’s departure from Sanctuary. Ryuzu, holding Frederica’s trembling shoulders, also looked as if she respected their mother’s decision.

Mother: “Gar-chan, your mommy will be coming back.”

Their mother lifted Garfiel up. Ignorant to his mother’s determination, he smiled cheerfully. She brought him close, kissing his forehead.

In the exact same spot where Garfiel now held a scar.

Mother: "I'll be coming back with your daddy. Until then, wait for me."

Garfiel: "—Hk!"

Her eyes filled with affection, her voice filled with compassion. To keep herself from losing that unforgettable memory, again and again, his mother kissed him.

Eventually, she handed young Garfiel to Ryuzu, cradled Garfiel firmly as she and his mother nodded to each other. His mother then hugged Frederica, showering her beloved daughter's forehead in a rain of kisses as well.

Garfiel: "—Haa, ahh. Uh, aaagh... Aaaaaaagh..."

As he witnessed this, Garfiel had fallen to his knees at some point in time. What in the world was he watching?

He did not know this. He had never seen this before.

This was supposed have been the memory from the time of his youth, back when he had known nothing, back when he had challenged the Trial, where he had seen something more hopeless, more garnished in crushing despair.

And even though he remembered it, even though he remembered that vivid feeling of being abandoned in that memory, he had believed that memory to be precious and cultivated his stubbornness.

All those empty threats, across his days up until now, which he had made to hide his sorrow and misery, peeled away, crumbled away, as something entirely different overwrote them.

What was this? This memory? Didn't his mother abandon him and his sister, leaving them to pursuit her own happiness? Hadn't she forsaken these nuisances from her life, determined to walk her own path?

It was completely backwards. His mother had deserted both himself and Frederica, and left. That was why Garfiel had been capable of shaping the existence that was Garfiel Tinsel with such conviction.

The second Garfiel would realize that it was all the illegitimate result of misdirected ideas, his secure barrier would amount to just a brittle dirt wall, his world collapsing beneath him.

Garfiel could not even stand any more, as his family's goodbyes reached their end.

His mother, reluctant to part, touched Frederica and Garfiel one last time, entrusting everything to Ryuzu as she picked up her bag and turned to exit the woods. She stopped many times along her path. Glanced back, at Frederica who was waving. Notices how Ryuzu had been holding Garfiel's hand, making him wave his goodbye to his mother, and she waved back.

She collected herself and again began to walk. Stopped. Glanced back, waved. Over and over, over and over and over and over, as his mom exits the forest—

Garfiel: “—Wha!?”

Just as he moved to stand up and follow her, his vision warped. The world was becoming devoid of its edges, and not entirely because of the teardrops swamping Garfiel's eyes. It was happening for a more clear-cut reason.

The edges of his vision was swarmed in white light, the forest disappearing.

It was like the end of the world. This unanticipated finale led Garfiel to turn towards the Witch behind him, and yell.

Garfiel: “Why! Why is it ending here! It hasn't reached the fundamental...”

Echidna: “No, it's over. There is no need to see anything further. It is not me who determined the dream as finished, but you. Congratulations, Garfiel. You've rewritten your past.”

Garfiel: “What are you...!? Stop messing with me! The part my amazin' self is most related to's after this!”

Echidna: “There is no need to see what comes next, and even supposing you have envisioned some idea of what does happen next, interfering with it is out of your scope.”

Garfiel: “Ah—”

“You cannot change the past”, was what the Witch was saying.

Garfiel's reddened face paled as he fell back to his knees.

He knew how his mother truly felt. And now this.

His mother's fate, having left this place, would not change?

His mother had left Sanctuary for Garfiel and Frederica's sake, in search of his father. But immediately after that journey had started, it was crushed, alongside his mother.

—Didn't just turn an already hopeless memory into something even more dismal?

Didn't a memory of despair piled upon despair just morph into one of hope crushed by hopelessness? What about himself was he supposed to change, with this?

Frederica: "Mother loved you and I both, Garf."

Garfiel raised his head up. Looking down at him as he kneeled was his sister, still young, looking at him. A supposedly blind past, incapable of interaction, was interacting with him.

Frederica: "Our Mother left Sanctuary for the sake of our family. Does that dissatisfy you?"

Garfiel: "Don't, mess with me! So what if we were loved! D—don't, shove u—undue memories onto me. I...!"

Frederica: "How much easier it was to be unloved."

In a tone of derision, young Frederica spoke towards Garfiel.

Their height difference was literally that of a child and an adult. But Frederica did not show the slightest care to his height, talking to him looking straight at him, with an expression suggesting her little brother was such a handful.

Frederica: "If you were allowed to believe your love was not reciprocated, you would be able to justify yourself."

Garfiel: "No!"

Frederica: "You love her, and she loves you... If you had discovered this, you would no longer be capable of justifying your refusal to go outside, and remain holed up in Sanctuary."

Garfiel: “No! No, no! And when ya don’t even know anythin’... What do you think happened to Mom!”

Frederica: “—Surely I would know.”

Garfiel left himself to his anger as he roared, and a shock hit him like a slap to the face. Frederica’s expression vanished. She looked at Garfiel, seemingly enduring some emotion.

—What did she just say?

Frederica: “Surely I would know. If we suppose Mother perhaps faced misfortune instantly after leaving Sanctuary... Surely that information would have reached me.”

Garfiel: “So what!?”

Frederica: “And surely you understand this information could not have reached you. You are no longer a child, Garf.”

Frederica knew what happened to their mother. And even Garfiel understood the reason as to she had been unable to tell young Garfiel that. Who could inform a young boy his mother had met a cruel demise?

Had he never peeped on the Trial in this Tomb, Garfiel would not have known. He knew because he had trampled over much consideration and kindness which had been trying not to let him find out.

Frederica: “In truth, you did remember that Mother loved you.”

Garfiel: “...”

Frederica: “You yourself wounded the spot where Mother had kissed you, where she had last touched you, in an attempt to pretend that it had not happened.”

His fingers touched his forehead scar. This wound did not exist on his brow when he was young.

He had sustained this injury right after he challenged the Trial. In a state of disarray, Garfiel had bashed his head open on the walls, on the floor, harming himself so greatly he suffered a permanent wound. This scar was his injury from back then. And the truth behind this scar was, surely, what Frederica had just said.

Frederica: "It's ending now."

Frederica whispered. Before he could realize it, the world had already nearly lost its shape. The forest was gone, as were his departing mother and Ryuzu. Not even the onlooking Witch was anywhere in sight, the world remaining with only the siblings, Frederica and Garfiel.

Frederica: "Even if you use wounds to conceal it, you cannot erase your past. Nor can you erase the fact that you were loved."

Garfiel: "What am I... meant to do?"

Garfiel asked this of Frederica, feebly.

Garfiel: "If Mom's end isn't changin', then that means the outside's still scary for me. Goin' out there, and nanna and everyone else havin' to go out there, scares me."

Frederica: "Must you really ask this of your small elder sister before you can figure any answer?"

Garfiel: "I know it's pathetic! But yer th'only one I can ask. C'mon, tell me... Sis, why did you..."

Frederica: "What is it that you wish to do, Garf?"

Interrupting him, Frederica tilted her head.

Garfiel's sentence stopped abruptly. What did he want to do? That was not what they were talking about. They were talking about what he should do, what did he need to do. That was what he was asking.

Frederica: "What is it that you wish to do, Garf?"

Looking somewhat exasperated, Frederica repeated the question. Garfiel swallowed his breath.

Garfiel: "I want to do, what people are looking for."

Frederica: "What people are looking for? Which people?"

Garfiel: "I wanna do what... what the people who need me are looking for from me."

Frederica: "Why is it that you feel this way?"



Illustration from Volume 13, coloring by Setowi ([source](#))

Garfiel: "Because... they are the ones who made me remember."

"Remember what?", but Frederica did not voice that question. However, those eyes, the same gold as his, did ask the question.

Garfiel: "—That my mother loved me."

—The world of the dream shattered to dust, the past vanishing into the beyond.

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Garfiel's expression as he left the Tomb looked like he had undergone exorcism, to Subaru.

Subaru had spent approximately an hour fidgeting outside the Tomb with his arms crossed, in waiting. The group had been anxious, never looking or speaking to each other, simply waiting in silence for whatever would happen.

Subaru: "So what's our plan if he goes back on his promise and destroys the Tomb?"

Albeit it had been intended as a joke in an attempt to ease the mood, Otto had replied with something incredibly inconsiderate to the situation, eating a dropkick from Ram, but generally speaking, it had been very quiet.

Ryuzu: "...Gar-bo."

Ryuzu had reunited with them, her expression anxious and hands linked as she looked restlessly at the Tomb.

The present Ryuzu was probably Theta, but regardless of which Ryuzu it is, they all cared about Garfiel dearly. There was that whole affair in which the five had ganged up to beat up Garfiel, and also that whole affair where Garfiel had had a complete change of heart and entered the Tomb. Both these events must have given Ryuzu more than a little shock to the heart.

Emilia looked at the Tomb in suspense as she stood beside Subaru.

While she would have been curious about Garfiel's attempt too, as was natural, once Garfiel exited the Tomb, it would be her turn to go inside.

The argument inside the Tomb, and the fight between Subaru and Garfiel afterwards. Subaru could not tell what kind of change those events had brought to her mental state. But her anxious expression was deeply steeped in concern for Garfiel, without an ounce of reluctance toward her own Trial. That was probably not a bad omen.

Otto: "—Ah!"

Subaru was immersed in those thoughts, when suddenly Otto pointed at the Tomb and spoke up.

"He's saying something without reading the mood again", thought Subaru as he grimaced, Ram clicking her knuckles. But this time it seemed their conclusions had been hasty ones.

Ryuzu: "Gar-bo!"

Ryuzu stood up and dashed for the Tomb.

Following her gaze, Subaru realized a silhouette had appeared at the Tomb's entrance.

Short blond hair, scar on his brow. A sharp gaze, canines like blades and lustrous. With a small frame and slouched posture, but nonetheless emitting a dreadful and imposing aura. Garfiel Tinsel.

Otto: "See, it's exactly what I said it'd— Eek!"

Recipient to a jab from Ram's knee, Otto went tumbling across the grass.

But without anyone raising the topic of Otto's suffering, they instead ran over to Garfiel. Subaru bounced up the stone stairway to reach him. Ryuzu had already arrived and was standing before Garfiel, mumbling what to say.

Ryuzu: "G—Gar-bo. Erm, I..."

Garfiel: "Don't go makin' a face that doesn't look like ya. Sorry for worryin' you."

Ryuzu: "Gar-bo."

With that blunt statement, Garfiel put his hand on small Ryuzu's head. Patting his grandmother's head was incredibly unscrupulous, but given their heights, it was natural for these two. And seeing as Ryuzu wasn't complaining about it, pointing it out would be beyond tasteless.

Ram: "How did it go, Garf?"

Ram came up the stairs behind Ryuzu and Subaru, and called out to Garfiel.

It had been Ram who had given Garfiel the direct incentive to challenge the Trial. Aware of the background circumstances, a shade of worry could be glimpsed in her expression. Something that had seldom happened in Subaru's presence.

Garfiel groaned in thought.

Garfiel: "Can't ya see the results with yer eyes? Gotta say I expected somethin' more."

Subaru: "For some reason that sounded like a middle schooler bragging about shoplifting, but if this is what you are saying... you did it?"

Garfiel: "—I'm thinkin' I've made my peace."

In response to Subaru, Garfiel exhales deeply through his nose. Everyone understood him instantly, but a different sentiment rose to the forefront.

Garfiel had overcome the Trial and had reached a conclusion about his past. That meant a step had been taken towards Sanctuary's liberation, proving the Trial was not unreasonable or impossible.

Subaru: "Alrightey then. You keep riding off that momentum and go for the other Trials too, and..."

Garfiel: "Piss off. The only Trial my amazin' self's takin's this one. It's not up to me to be doin' the others, yeah?"

Emilia: "Yes, you are right. The rest are up to me. Can't have that be taken away."

Garfiel glared at Emilia, who accepted the gaze directed straight at her.

Garfiel: "Witch's bein' an asshole as usual. Make sure to watch out."

Emilia: “Huh? You are giving me advice? Thank you. I’ll remember it well.”

That was Garfiel’s breed of ironic encouragement. Emilia accepted it while beautifully ignoring the sardonicism.

Garfiel looked utterly disappointed and, seeing that expression, Subaru’s cheeks relaxed into a smile—and this time, Garfiel’s gaze was directed to Subaru.

In front of Subaru, who’s brows shot up, Garfiel scratched his cheek.

Garfiel: “Uh, I need to, right... Yeah.”

Subaru: “What’s up? Being skittish doesn’t suit your character. You’re the type that just kills those hesitant or broody types, so we’ll do tribal play instead.”

Garfiel: “I ain’t got any idea what the hell yer sayin’, but I can tell yer makin’ fun of me, oy. Yer gettin’ yer teeth beat in... Aah, errrr, no, never mind.”

He brought up his arm, only to lower it without doing anything. Garfiel’s suspicious, or rather not-exactly-getting-to-the-point behavior made Subaru tilt his head. Then a smile appeared on Ram’s face, as if she understood everything.

Ram: “Garf.”

With that, she poked Garfiel in the hip. Garfiel sighed, shaking his head resignedly.

Garfiel: “It’s probably ‘cause of you that I passed the Trial. Thank you.”

Subaru: “...Did you just thank me?”

Garfiel: “I ain’t sayin’ it again. But, I got to remember somethin’ I wanted to remember. So goin’ in there was... worth it. Shit!”

Perhaps because his embarrassment had peaked over time as he talked, Garfiel’s face reddened in agitation as he jabbed his finger at Subaru, wide-eyed.

Garfiel: "Listen! My amazin' self did lose, 'n my Trial did change. But! Ya ain't gonna see me accept every word of everythin' you've said as correct 'n raise the white flag 'n surrender! Ya talked big, sayin' you'll change this Sanctuary! If that change hurts or pains the folks inside, yer not gonna be gettin' any mercy!"

Subaru: "Uhh... R—right, that's reasonable..."

Garfiel spoke in an overwhelmingly menacing manner, Subaru was in awe, but was nevertheless managing to get words out.

Subaru could not give Garfiel any absolute guarantees. But he was able to promise he would be doing his best to improve their situation. That much was definite. And just as he resolved to say this—

Garfiel: "So I'm gonna be watchin' ya from up close t'see whether ya wind up just bein' some all-talk bastard or not— You better pull it off, Captain!"

Subaru: "——"

Garfiel vigorously slapped Subaru's shoulders, gaze fixed on him, making that incredible statement. His unexpected form of address and his attitude stunned Subaru so much he was slow to react.

During that delay, Garfiel immediately passed by Subaru and descended to the bottom of the stairway with Ryuzu. Almost as if he was scared someone would see his face.

Emilia: "Garfiel, your face is sooo red."

Perhaps catching a glimpse of his face before he can pass by, Emilia spoke while trying to hold back a smile. Which meant that no, Subaru's ears had not been not tricking him.

Subaru: "Captain... I'm not the one heading this group, that's Emilia."

Emilia: "But it was your group which beat Garfiel, Subaru. He accepted what came out of a man-to-man conflict, which means you are his Captain. Isn't that great, Captain?"

Emilia smiled without any ill will and Subaru was lost on how to respond. Ram jabbed the troubled Subaru in the side, telling him "Accept it", shrugging.

Ram: “He isn’t sure what he should be doing when he gets emotional either. Let him do what he wants.”

Subaru: “But still. I am utterly weak to it, but it’s...”

Ram: “Leaving aside strength in a fight, you are the older party, Barusu, so at least give him that much leniency. Garf is a child despite his looks. Doesn’t it feel like you’ve got a younger brother now?”

Subaru: “Hold on a second.”

Ram: “What?”

Subaru: “Can you go over that?”

Ram: “Over what?”

Subaru: “Garfiel’s younger than me?”

In response to Subaru’s question, Ram nodded in comprehension with a short “Ah—”.

Ram: “Did you not know? Garf is younger than you, Barusu.”

Subaru: “How young?”

Ram: “I believe he’s fourteen this year.”

Subaru: “Fourteen!? Fourteen... He’s a chuuni¹⁶⁵!?”

Those entirely unanticipated news made Subaru’s voice crack in surprise. Suddenly, he was able to accept being called Captain, and Garfiel’s overly childish stubbornness.

Subaru: “A middle schooler in the peak of his rebellious age... Right, that’s a nightmare to tame...”

Muttered Subaru, his voice showing even more exhaustion than after their fistfight.

¹⁶⁵ “Chuuni”, also known as “chuunibyou” (中二病), or literally translated as “middle two disease” or, alternatively, “middle-school second-year disease”. Well-known term to describe kids in middle school who have delusions of grandeur, like special powers. It even has its own [Wikipedia page](#)!

Arc 4 Chapter 117 - Love Letters

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 13, Chapter 8 “Love Letter”, Parts 6-8

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by SummaryAnon — [Complete](#), Page 243

With Garfiel’s hostility quashed and the shocking reveal of his age, a period of rest fell upon the scene outside the Tomb. Everyone surrounded Garfiel, each waiting for their chance to speak.

Subaru: “Geez... Our man-to-man fight sure starts feeling different now that it was basically us ganging together to beat up a middle schooler. It’s iffy.”

Otto: “Garfiel’s age is a shock to me as well, but surely those misgivings would be unwarranted? The fact our opponent, who we all needed to work together and gang up on to defeat, was actually fourteen holds not the slightest bearing on the details of the combat.”

Ram: “Exactly. Garf is disproportionately powerful for such a babyish teen, and there is no logical reason to begin complaining about the fact we ganged up on him.”

Garfiel: “All of ya, shut yer traps ‘bout gangin’ up on me! Yer lookin’ for another tussle!? Eh!? My amazin’ self’s always ready fer it!”

Subaru, Otto, and Ram all nodded, as Garfiel sent spit flying.

Thinking back on everything Garfiel had said and done up to this point, and seeing him yelling and asserting himself the way he was, yes, indeed, he was a fourteen-year-old. The way Subaru had treated Garfiel so far, as if they were in the same age-group, may have actually placed a filter on the way he interpreted everything that was unraveling.

Subaru: “Actually, how old were you when you took the Trial before? Your stubbornness got worse after that.”

Garfiel: "My memory of that ain't perfect, but... I think I was three or four. I don't exactly remember anythin' 'cept the Trial."

Otto: "You'd expect that, yes. Three or four... That's the same age as when I still thought that the world was hell."

Subaru: "You are bringing up heavy stuff out of nowhere, stop. I don't wanna hear it."

A grim smile arose on Otto's face as he spoke. Otto must have had his problems, but delving into them at this point in time would have been over his capacity. Subaru's arms were already full, and holding more baggage than he could carry, he had resorted to balancing it on his head and hammocking it in his lap.

Emilia: "Do you mind if I ask you for specifics?"

With the joking over, Emilia breached the real topic, face tense. Her gaze fixed on Garfiel, the true meaning of her question most likely was about the specifics of the Trial. But Garfiel snorted—

Garfiel: "Got nothin' specific to tell. Me 'n you are gonna have different pasts, 'n they are gonna need to be beaten differently. Don't think I can tell ya anythin' useful."

Emilia: "I know. My Trial is my Trial. It won't help very much to ask you about it."

Garfiel: "—? Then what on earth are ya askin' 'bout?"

Emilia: "Now that you've overcome the Trial... No, overcome your past, do you feel like you've changed? That you can accept that change in yourself?"

Garfiel narrowed his eyes in silence. The atmosphere was getting tense. Subaru and the others swallowed their breath as they waited for Garfiel's response.

There was a period of silence. Garfiel touched his nose, his fingers then tracing upwards along his scar. With that done—

Garfiel: "Can't tell whether to say somethin's changed, or to say I got somethin' back."

Emilia: "Mhm."

Garfiel: "This scar on my head's somethin' I did to myself. To try 'n forget a bad memory."

Garfiel tapped his forehead, his gaze fixed on the person standing beside and looking at him— Ram, who blinked her cerise eyes.

Ram: "Garf."

Garfiel: "Shut it, don't say anythin'. It'll make me miserable. Pushed th' blame for it on to someone else so I could hide a bad memory. Realizing now how ya knew that 'n went along with it for my sake suddenly makes me feel like crap."

Garfiel grumbled, as Ram watched him somewhat resignedly.

Subaru could not grasp the exact significance of their exchange, but he could tell this information referred to things only Garfiel and Ram would understand.

And could also tell that Garfiel and Ram had a definite, warm, and familial kind of bond.

Garfiel: "Anyway, whether we're sayin' it changed or came back, I ain't th'same as before. Ya guys changed me. So now's to see how you'll all change, makin' sure ya don't wind up bein' all talk."

Emilia: "Mhm. Good. And I'll be doing my best to match your expectations."

Garfiel's cheeks twisted while Emilia smiled, full of determination.

Subaru abruptly realized, if one considered the mental factor alone, those two were the same age.

Fourteen-year-olds. A boy and a girl in the emotional throes of puberty, and a situation that required the future of this place rested on them. Subaru was seventeen, verging on eighteen, so he was not in the position to say much, but everything had wound up being a very manga-like or anime-like predicament.

Emilia: "Staying too long will just reduce my resolve."

Emilia stood up and wiped off the grass from her waist. Exhaling deeply, her eyes gleaming with strength, she looked at the Tomb— the site of the Trial.

Subaru: "You're going?"

Emilia: "I am.... I'll follow Garfiel's performance, I'm absolutely going to beat it."

Garfiel: "Can ya do it?"

Emilia: "I'll do it. I've decided not to be afraid to change."

Emilia nodded to both Subaru's and to Garfiel's questions.

Subaru stood up and stands next to Emilia as she starts walking toward the Tomb. Even if he was unable to go inside and stay with her, holding her hand, he had determined to stay at her side until her departure.

Ram: "Emilia-sama."

Emilia stopped and turned around, for Ram to deliver a curtsey. Pinching her skirt, solemnly, as if she were a servant paying respect to someone of higher status.

Subaru: "Well no crap. Undoubtedly, Emilia-tan is a master to her."

Ram: "Silence your muttering, Barusu. Practice prudence enough to know that this is no situation for that."

Ram sternly rebuked Subaru's mumbling. Emilia's eyes widened, and Ram collected herself by once again bowing her head.

Ram: "I request forgiveness for my rudeness. I had, in full sincerity, doubted whether you would rise to the situation."

Emilia: "Hmm. I'm sorry, for being so ineffective."

Ram: "Indeed, you were ineffective and a blight to onlooking eyes."

Subaru: "Oh, come on."

How much courage had it taken Subaru to convey that sentiment to Emilia? While grinding his teeth at Ram, who scaled difficult hurdles easily, he continued to listen.

Ram: “But now you have stood up and have decided to take on this challenge. Whether that was preceded by a desire to flee, presents not the slightest of issues.”

Emilia: “...”

Ram: “I had determined. Would your stance be one to challenge the Trial, or something else? Where I would entrust my own problems rested upon that. Should you have exhibited a desire to flee in surrender, I would have gone with the flow of the world. But should you have exhibited a desire to fight—”

Ram glanced at Subaru. How was he connected to this part of her speech? Perhaps that provided the answer as to why she had allied herself with Subaru and Otto to fight Garfiel.

Ram: “May your endeavors proceed well, Emilia-sama. I shall wait for your safe return.”

Ram delivered a curtsy in silence, an impeccable exhibition of a maid giving farewell to her master. Seemingly empowered by Ram’s send-off, Emilia firmly nodded, her expression cheery.

Seeing this, Subaru uncrossed his arms and nodded.

Subaru: “So going with the flow of the conversation, you got anything to say, Otto?”

Otto: “Well it’s amazing how demanding that prospect feels now but is this truly a situation in which I should be saying anything!? Don’t you find anything wrong with this!?”

Subaru directed the conversation onto Otto, figuring that he would be prepared to say something, but apparently whatever he had in mind could not hope to beat Ram’s speech.

Seems like he wanted to pay consideration for the situation, and let it all end cleanly— But,

Emilia: “Okay. Please go ahead.”

Otto: “—!”

Unheeding to Otto’s distress and figuring that he would encourage her, Emilia is ready to accept it. She waited with a tense expression, failing to notice his panic. To such an innocent attitude from Emilia, Otto finally put his hand to his forehead with a look of resignation.

Otto: “Erm, well, ok, Emilia-sama.”

Emilia: “I’m listening.”

Otto: “It happens that actually, I’ve paid some rather considerable damages thanks to this whole debacle. Though yes naturally this has the nuance of being a joint-investment, and the damages had already been factored in this payment...”

Emilia: “Hm?”

The topic transformed into money business and Emilia, not the brightest in mathematics, looked confused. Otto bit his lip and raised his finger with an “Okay, that’s right!”.

Otto: “I chose to assume these damages with the anticipation that, someday, you would grow into something great and hefty. So you need to prevail and ensure I regain the expenses I made for this bet!”

Emilia: “...I think I’m already all grown up. Eating will make me fatter though¹⁶⁶.”

Subaru: “Don’t use tricky phrasing on our sheltered angel. Also Emilia-tan, I think everything you are doing right now hits the golden ratio so just keep going like that. Right now, you are the loveliest.”

From head to toes, Emilia’s current state was perfect. That said, of course Subaru would have found her lovable still, regardless whether she thinned down or fattened up.

But leaving Subaru’s sentiments aside, Otto looked like he could not find anything to say about the fact his statements did not communicate in full, and after a bit of flailing—

Otto: “...Come back safely. I’m supporting you.”

Emilia: “Mhm, understood. Otto-kun, thank you for helping me too.”

Emilia responded to Otto’s hideously safe summarization with a strong nod. Garfiel gave Otto, who had slumped his shoulders, a comforting shove. Witnessing that, Subaru and Emilia once again headed for the Tomb.

¹⁶⁶ A small pun. “太い” can mean both “hefty” or “fat/thick”.

Night had fallen over Sanctuary. It was the time of day during which the Trial would occur.

Emilia took repeated deep, in and out, to steel herself. With her beside him, Subaru pondered what would be the best thing to say to see her off. And then---

Emilia: "Subaru."

Subaru: "Hmm?"

Emilia: "So about that thing in the Tomb..."

She was anxious about the Trial. Thinking this, Subaru waited for Emilia to continue. But she was unable to say anything as she glanced at him sporadically, her expression uneasy. For some reason, her cheeks were tinged red.

Subaru: "Emilia?"

Emilia: "S--so, erm, the thing in the Tomb."

Subaru: "Thing in the... Oh, you don't mean what's coming up, you mean the stuff from before?"

Emilia: "Yes, geez."

"It's obvious I meant that", said Emilia's expression as she puffed up her cheeks. But considering how the whole scene had been going until this point, Subaru couldn't agree with her criticism.

Like anyone would have thought that Emilia, ready to challenge the imminent Trial, was worried not about the future but the past. Though if one considered that the Trial waiting inside the Tomb was also the past, the whole topic of time would start getting confusing and vague.

And though the momentum and all the grisly events that followed meant Subaru had forgotten about it, thinking back on it, the deed he had committed could send his face bursting into flame. Arguing with Emilia, slinging insults, shoving love at her, snapping down to steal a kiss--- call all that an explosion of all the wrath he had built up over these five loops, and it was still no excuse.

That whole affair was probably what was troubling Emilia.

It was pleasant to see crimson on her pale skin, but Subaru had no opening to be getting transfixed here either.

Emilia: “Inside, where we, hm... You know.”

Subaru: “Y—yeah... Mhm, right.”

Emilia: “And, hm, I think it’s going to be tough, but it’s important, so... when the Trial and everything else is done, let’s take our time to talk, okay?”

Subaru had no choice but to nod to Emilia’s proposal, even though he believed his mind to be taking it tough already. It was Subaru’s first time, and definitely Emilia’s first time as well. Their feelings had crashed into each other, and they had mountains of things they need to sort out. And for Subaru, the unavoidable topic of Rem was also something that needed to be managed as well, with no excuse.

Either way—

Subaru: “Oh, you’ve got plenty of time to think about the future, Emilia-tan.”

Emilia: “Can I afford that? I’m not sure. I might just be getting cocky.”

Subaru: “But if you can afford to be confident, then it means your head isn’t close to bursting. You’ll pull it off. I can bet on it.”

Subaru shot her a thumbs-up, his teeth sparkling. Emilia tilted her head in mystification.

Emilia: “Bet what on it?”

Subaru: “The right for us to go on a date.”

Emilia: “Then what happens if you win, and what happens if I win?”

Subaru: “I win and I can go on a date with you, you win and you can go on a date with me.”

Emilia couldn’t help but giggle, and for a period, the two chuckled together. It truly did seem that Emilia was neither stressed nor anxious.

Emilia: “I’ll bet that I will beat the Trial.”

Subaru: "Okay, I'll bet on Emilia beating the Trial."

Emilia: "And if we both win?"

Subaru: "Two dates."

Emilia: "Yes yes."

Like always, Emilia smoothly ignored Subaru's flirting. She moved forward, her silver hair dancing on the wind, glimmering under starlight. Subaru raised his hand as he saw her off.

Subaru: "Take care now. Watch out for cars, and men."

Emilia: "Stop being silly."

With a wry smile, Emilia's shape disappeared into the Tomb. The unlit corridor swallowed her into the darkness, robbing her silhouette from Subaru's sight.

There was no longer anything Subaru was able to do for Emilia. Everything else was now a problem she must overcome herself.

Garfiel: "Stop lookin' so worried, Captain. Makes ya less of a man."

Subaru: "Man, every time I think you are a middle schooler, somehow I can just accept this stuff you say. I was like you too once upon a time."

Garfiel arrived next to antsy Subaru's side and scolded him. As Subaru was shrugging, Garfiel drove his fist to his palm, remembering something.

Garfiel: "Oh yeah, Captain. When we were fightin' 'n ya smacked me flyin', what the hell was that?"

Subaru: "You mean Invisible Providence?"

Garfiel: "In... What?"

Subaru: "Invisible Providence. The Imperceptible Will of the Gods. Isn't it cool?"

Garfiel: "It's pretty cool, yeah."

Garfiel had found a compatriot in Subaru.

Unseen Hand's reputation was pretty bad, so he was hoping Invisible Providence would catch on. But either way, Subaru was doubtful Garfiel was just asking about its name.

Garfiel: "Magic... That's not what it is. It's just a feelin', but the vibe ain't right."

Subaru: "If we are gonna bother classifying it, honestly I have no clue either. But it's definitely something occult. Try all you want, but you'll never copy it."

Garfiel: "Not plannin' to. Hittin' someone with somethin' they can't see's cowardly."

Subaru: "C—cowardly, what's this punk saying...!"

He had been looking for mutual understanding on Invisible Providence's awesomeness, only to be stricken down in shocking fashion.

"My bad my bad" said Garfiel, looking completely unapologetic, but making no effort to inquire any further. Probably, he had sensed it. This occult thing was not something good for a man to delve into.

Subaru: "...But still, what's with this cause and effect?"

Invisible Providence— It was, unmistakably, Petelgeuse's Unseen Hand. There was a difference in strength, and he was only able to manifest one hand, but the sensation was unmistakable. Why did the same power the abhorrent madman held now dwell inside Subaru? Perhaps, it had something to do with the Witch Factor that Echidna had mentioned.

Witch Factor. The words suggested nothing pleasant, and it was also a term used by Petelgeuse. And the first time Subaru had used this thing reminiscent of Unseen Hand had not been during this recent battle. He had previously used it instinctively, to evade a charge from Garfiel who had transformed into a tiger, in a previous loop.

That meant the Witch Factor was steadily taking root inside Subaru.

Subaru knew he could no longer use Shamac. Repeated abuses of his gate had extinguished the exhausted magical gateway's function. He could no longer feel a connection with the magical world, a world once unknown to him.

He had lost his yearned-for magical powers, gaining occult powers in its stead. How ironic.

Subaru: "It's better than having no aces up my sleeve. Feels like there's proper technique to use it, but also doesn't, really..."

Regardless, nothing had changed about the scarcity of his options in battle. He would resort to turning and turning his cunning little brain, enlisting help from others while divining an escape from fatality.

The height of the walls Subaru needed to challenged remained as high as ever.

Garfiel: "Oh, just thought of somethin', Captain."

Subaru: "What's up? This whole Captain thing is still throwing me off."

Garfiel: "You'll get accustomed. Anyway, there's somethin' I gotta'pologize for."

He hadn't accepted the change in address, but Garfiel just looked on in admiration. Like Emilia before him, Subaru smiled wryly at the fact there were so many things to say, one after the other.

He shrugged to urge Garfiel on, his fingers tracing over his scar.

Garfiel: "My amazin' self went into the Tomb. 'N so my amazin' self went into the Trial room."

Subaru: "Yes, I'm following."

Garfiel: "N' so, I saw them— Yer, uhhhhh, frantic results."

Subaru's brows furrowed for an instant— but he immediately realized what Garfiel was referring to, and his eyes shot open. Shocked, Subaru's ears blazed red.

He saw them. He saw them he saw them hesawthem!

Garfiel: "W—wasn't tryin' to do anythin' bad. But to think it'd wound up bein'..."

Subaru: "S—stop talking! Forget it now! You, crap... I forgot! I mean... I mean, I didn't think you'd end up going into the Tomb! And then you... Agh, fuck!"

Clutching and shaking his head, Subaru's face got hotter.

Garfiel, who was looking at him with a look of pity, was now a loathsome being. Perhaps even more loathsome than during the fistfight.

Subaru: “You forget about it! That’s all I’m looking for! Okay, conversation over! Done!”

Garfiel: “Yep, will do. But here’s what I thought when I saw ‘em. Yer an absolute, incredible moron. But I’m glad ya ain’t dead.”

Subaru: “I said it’s over, are you some braindead brat!? Wait! You are a brat!”

Although he was called a brat, Garfiel had grasped Subaru’s weak point and remained the superior party between the two. He laughed away Subaru’s screams of defeat before descending the Tomb stairs.

Following after Garfiel as he returned to everyone else in the clearing, Subaru prayed for Emilia’s good fortune, while simultaneously begging she would not notice his cheers.

That sort of thing would be ruined if it didn’t reach the intended recipient first.

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And as such, Subaru’s prayers did not go in vain.

Emilia: “I’m here...”

Exiting the stone corridor, Emilia arrived in the room in which the Trial took place.

Amid the cold, damp air, Emilia walked using the dimly-glowing wall as her guide and gazed at the door in the back of the room. This closed door would likely open once the Trials had been cleared. Garfiel had come back to the group without opening the door. Meaning, she---

Emilia: “Have to do my best to get inside there.”

She did not know what might be lurking back there. But Emilia had been told, from the mouth of the Witch, that the number of Trials amounted to more than just one.

When she thought of the Witch conducting the Trials, painful itch spread through Emilia's chest. This was possible because that white Witch's welcome to Emilia was——

Emilia: "Huh?"

Momentarily in thought, Emilia cast her gaze about the room, noticing something odd. During her time spent hugging her knees and waiting for night in this Tomb, Emilia had never gone more than halfway through the corridor, and so, she had not ventured as far as this room. This meant this was her first time witnessing the chamber in two days.

It had only been two days, but something had changed over that time. While mulling over what that something was, Emilia realized the nature of the oddity.

Emilia: "This is..."

Brushing her fingertips over the wall, Emilia murmured. Her amethyst eyes began adjusting to the dark, and they began to capture the change clearly.

Emilia: "Subaru, you idiot."

With a hint of laughter in her voice, Emilia found herself saying this involuntarily. Because that was really it. When she looked at it, she couldn't help but think that.

Emilia: "You are reeeally an idiot."

Contrary to her words, Emilia's expression was filled with tender affection. This change on the portion of wall she was touching, over the wall before her, over a whole face of this room, top to bottom.

——Etchings. Pictures, letters, chiseled into the wall all large and crooked. That big chibi¹⁶⁷ drawing of a cat was a familiar picture of Puck. Many drawings of Puck had been etched into the wall, all surrounded with writing.

The messy I-glyphs, scattered everywhere as if written by a child, proved beyond any doubt he had worked frantically with Emilia's interests in mind.

¹⁶⁷ Cute caricature. See [here](#).

“You can do it, I know you can!”, “Me and Puck are supporting you, everything’s okay”, “This girl I’m into is amazing! Have confidence in yourself!”, “Once this is all over let’s go on a date”, “Go for it, Emilia!”, “Nobody is expecting anything from us. Is there anything more fun than proving them all wrong?”, “I love you! So I believe in you!”—

Emilia: “Idiot... idiot, idiot, idiot... You featherbrain, Subaru.”

She had to challenge the Trial now and had been bracing herself to face something painful and unpleasant, and here he was pretending to support her while making her cry, this awful man.

She understood. She understood now.

The last time Emilia had come here had been two days ago. There had only been one day of opportunity for these drawings and writings to be etched. And that was the only time during which Subaru had the opportunity to leave Emilia’s side, and the only time he so stubbornly had kept silent about what he was doing over that period.

Emilia: “—Mhm. You are right. Let’s do it, Subaru.”

Her fingers lovingly brushing the letters, Emilia responded to the engraved words. Instantly, she felt herself falling into slumber, the world’s edges turning dim.

The Trial was coming. That terrifying past was coming.

—But Emilia’s lips kept smiling.

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Subaru: “Broke my promise to go write love letters, and then someone else winds up seeing them first... My life’s over...”

Garfiel: “Yer exaggeratin’ it...”

Surrounding Subaru, too stricken by shock to stand, Garfiel and the others allowed themselves to look as flabbergasted as they wanted.

But having said that, there was nothing for the group to do here, except waiting for Emilia to come out. While it did sound good to hang around here, waiting while believing in her, that was also a Trial in itself for everyone who needed to sit around and wait.

Subaru: "It took Garfiel about an hour... So we should assume Emilia will take that long too."

Otto: "Supposing that she succeeds, you'd be corre— Ow!? Also aagh!?"

Otto's reward for his insensitive blunder was Ram's elbow. Seeing Otto jabbed by Ram, Garfiel's face twisted in jealousy, so he sent his finger flying to poke Otto's forehead. Otto toppled backwards as he tumbled to the ground, but no one mentioned it.

Subaru: "Actually, there was something I wanted to ask you and Garfiel, Ryuzu-san."

Ryuzu: "Something to ask me and Gar-bo?"

Ryuzu stood there uncomfortably as she looked up at Subaru. She had gone into hiding, and albeit unintentional, had ended up aiding Subaru and the others in their plans to defeat Garfiel. She still seemed somewhat lost on how to approach Garfiel, and so their grandmother-grandson conversations had been rather awkward for a little while now.

That said, Ryuzu was the only one worrying about it, for Garfiel felt no negativity towards her whatsoever.

Subaru: "Yes. A question. Though it's tricky whether you'll be able to understand it right now, Ryuzu-san."

"Tricky to understand right now", meant tricky to understand for Theta.

Alpha, Beta, Theta, and Sigma were the four Ryuzus representing Sanctuary. With the Garfiel problem resolved, the Ryuzus' stances toward Sanctuary's liberation would hopefully be in accord, but it was essential to check.

But most importantly, there were still some things that did not feel quite right.

Subaru: "Garfiel, you are all for Sanctuary's freedom now right?"

Garfiel: "It's not 'bout agreein' to it, Captain. My amazin' self lost to ya. So I'm not gonna get in the Captain's way as you all free Sanctuary. I'm gonna make sure the people in that changed Sanctuary ain't gonna suffer... That's my stance now."

Subaru: "Right, that stance right there."

Garfiel: "Eh?"

With his finger raised, Subaru pulled the breaks on Garfiel's speech.

Garfiel looked mystified, as did everyone else listening. Nobody must have felt that Garfiel said anything strange. But Subaru is uneasy.

Subaru: "When we first came here, your standpoint wasn't for or against it, it was pretty neutral... The same kind of thing like you said just now."

Garfiel: "...I was thinkin' you'd all get on guard 'bout me if you knew where I was leanin'."

Subaru: "But you got wary about us, instantly and plainly. Maybe we made some blunder, or say, tripped on a tiger's tail, but anyway, what was with that change in mentality?"

It was just weird. At the very least, on Emilia's first day taking the Trial, or until around the time she had taken the Trial, Garfiel's appeared to be friendly towards Subaru's group. Only after she failed the Trial did Garfiel expose his hostility on that night. With the Witch's Miasma emanating from Subaru as his pretext, Garfiel declared himself an enemy.

But Garfiel could not actually smell the Witch's Miasma from Subaru. Someone else had been noticing the Miasma, and Garfiel opted for hostility after learning about it from that someone else. The one who had reported the Miasma to Garfiel, and who had been spurring him into hostility was—

Subaru: "Ryuzu-san was eyeing me, who opposed the liberation of Sanctuary."

While looking down at the silenced Ryuzu, Subaru rested his raised finger on his crossed arms. The Ryuzu here is Ryuzu Theta— the only duplicate which had not been in favor of Sanctuary's liberation.

Alpha and Beta were in favor of liberation, and Sigma was neutral. Theta knew about the true Ryuzu Meyer's past, and viewed Sanctuary's liberation as dangerous. If he was going to add further support to

his speculation, then it'd to note how inconceivable it would be that any other Ryuzu would spur Garfiel's change of attitude.

Garfiel nodded, his face puckered.

Garfiel: "Ya nailed it, Captain. Nanna told me..."

Ryuzu: "Ya got it all wrong, Su-bo. I never told Gar-bo about..."

Their voices were in sync, but their arguments were not.

Subaru furrowed his brows as Garfiel and Ryuzu looked at each other. Garfiel's mouth flapped open and shut uselessly as he pointed at the stunned Ryuzu.

Garfiel: "W—what are ya sayin'? Ya told me on the first night that lady took the Trial. Ya smelled Witch from the Captain. Then there's th'half-devil lady too, that maybe they were the Witch's assistants... So, I..."

Ryuzu: "Did I mention...? No, I haven't noticed the Miasma around Su-bo, and I don't have the most flawless thoughts about Emilia-sama's heritage, but... that ain't relevant to this. I was tryin' to make my decisions align with Ros-bo's outline as best I could, and..."

Subaru: "Wait! Wait, freeze! Ryuzu-san, you just said you don't know anything about this."

Ryuzu was rejecting Garfiel's statements. Garfiel looked to be in utter disbelief, but considering these words were coming out of Ryuzu's mouth, they were undoubtably true. The people of this Sanctuary were contracted not to tell lies while inside Sanctuary.

Subaru: "Leaving aside a situation in which the person doesn't think they are lying, Ryuzu-san's statements can't be a lie; if she says she hasn't done something, she hasn't."

Garfiel: "But, it's true that I—"

Subaru: "I'm not doubting you. I know you've been lied to. Ryuzu-san, do all the Ryuzu-sans agree with what you just said?"

Ryuzu's face paled as she nodded. This meant that neither Ryuzu Alpha, nor Beta, nor Theta, nor Sigma had spurred Garfiel's change of attitude. But Garfiel himself had stated his change of attitude had been prompted by Ryuzu.

Subaru raised his head, looking at Garfiel's face who, in turn, clicked his teeth as he shook his head, with nary a trace of a lie in his complexion. In the first place, his personality was not suited to telling lies.

And now that his pretense of being Sanctuary's barrier had been stripped away, that had become even obvious.

Subaru: "Ram."

Ram: "I will mention that no magic exists to change a person's shape. Not even Roswaal-sama would be capable of such a thing."

Subaru: "What do you think's going on, then?"

Ram had no answer to Subaru's question. She probably did not know how to resolve that contradiction as well. Subaru was half-convinced that it was a trap set by Roswaal, rather, he had no other options.

Subaru: "I would like to wait here until Emilia comes back, but—"

Only ten minutes had passed since Emilia had entered the Tomb. Once she cleared the Trial and came back out, Subaru wanted to be the one to welcome her, arms open wide. He wanted to celebrate her. But—

Subaru: "Let's interrogate Roswaal. Have to find out what bad things he's doing at this last hour."

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—Emilia could not tell whether waking up inside a dream ought to be called awakening.

Until just a moment previous, she had been inside a stone chamber. Ejected from the Trial room, Emilia now found herself inside a nostalgic forest.

Tall trees surround her surroundings, she could feel the cool breeze on her skin and warm earth at her feet.

Those memories, flashing back— The snowscape of the white forest, as she had seen before in the Trial.

But that had yet to begin.

No snow was falling, as Emilia's consciousness was welcomed by green. And—

???: "Hey. These past few days have had a real turnout."

As Emilia held her breath to confirm her own whereabouts, she heard a voice.

Emilia's visit had formed this dream world. Amid scenes from a memory which had not existed until now, standing there under the shade of a tree, as if all that was a matter of course, was somebody.

Dressed in black clothing from head to toe, hair and skin like scattered snow, was this woman of white. It was a beautiful Witch, who seemed to have explored beauty using only two colors. She who presided over the Trial, the lord of the Tomb that showed visions of the past— the Witch of Greed, Echidna.

The Witch stood there relying on the tree trunk behind her to lean back, as she tilted her head at Emilia. Emilia stares back straight at the Witch, swallowing her breath.

Echidna: "Truly, quite the turnout. Some guests warrant a warm welcome— Some do not, as they are uninvited."

Emilia: "..."

Echidna: "It's amazing how you can come back so shamelessly, after flaunting all your hideousness. Even I have to find myself shocked at your audacity and failure to quit."

The Witch staring at Emilia struck her with words, things full of spite and disdain. Those numb, dark eyes did not possess the slightest resemblance to those dark eyes which always look at her so kindly. With all the malice she has known and been showered in, Emilia can tell.

This was malicious intent on an entirely different dimension from what she knows. The spite Emilia had received thus had been targeted broadly at a silver-haired half-elf, a blade lacking reason.

However, the maliciousness this Witch directed was different. It was not targeted at a silver-haired half-elf, but was instead enmity fully focused on Emilia.

Echidna: “You hit setbacks and bawl, but provided you can corrupt a man into embracing you, it matters not to you, you whore. You defiler who desecrates my world. You shameless, self-loving person, as he forgives you over and over, you reprobate— What do you think, daughter of the Witch?”

Until recently, these abusive words would have clawed at Emilia’s heart. It wasn’t that she would have yielded before this malice and given up on the Trial entirely, but these words did start flaying and abrading her heart, chipping away at her capacity to resist her past.

The Witch had no wish for Emilia to take the Trial, or to overcome it.

The Witch had not a single expectation that Emilia would overcome the Trial at all.

Subaru: *“Nobody is expecting anything from us. Is there anything more fun than proving them all wrong?”*

“I see, that’s exactly what Subaru would say”, she thought. And so, Emilia raised her arm, jabbing her finger toward the heavens. The same way Natsuki Subaru did when stating the audacious, when stimulating his courage.

Emilia: “My name is just Emilia. Born in Elixir Forest, the Witch of Glaciation.”

Emilia could tell the Witch was disappointed. Feeling satisfaction in that, Emilia lowered her skyward finger to point at her.

Emilia: “I will not give in to the malice of a fellow Witch. After all, I’m a pain in the ass of a woman.”

Character Pages for Volume 13



Characters

Re: Life in a different world
from zero

Characters

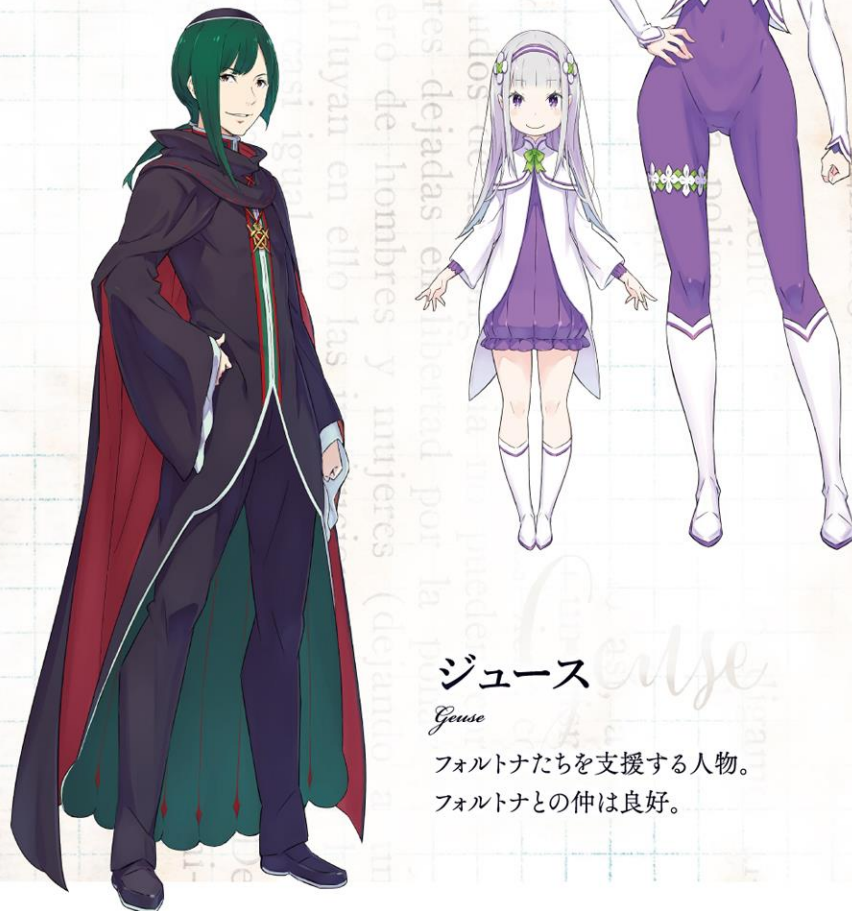
Re: Life in a different world
from zero

The only ability I got in a different world "Returns by Death"
I die again and again to save her.

エミリア(幼少期)&フォルトナ

Emilia & Fortuna

幼きエミリアとその養母フォルトナ。



ジューズ

Geuse

フォルトナたちを支援する人物。
フォルトナとの仲は良好。

Web Novel Volume 14



Arc 4 Chapter 118 - The Day Alpha Orionis Smiled

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 14, Chapter 1 “—Journey of Memories”, Part 8; Volume 14, Chapter 3 “The Day Alpha Orionis Laughed”, Part 1

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by SummaryAnon — [Complete](#), Page 3

Emilia walked leisurely, with experienced gait, along the unmarked trail flanked by tall trees.

She stepped on grass, treaded on earth, taking care not to trample on any flowers hidden beneath the bulging roots. Hard ground could be felt beneath her feet, but Emilia found it strange— After all, she was dreaming.

Never mind how an ordinary dream would proceed, here she could feel the texture of the tree bark, smell the sweet aroma of the flowers, and feel the warmth of the breeze.

Emilia: “It’s a dream world, but I can feel everything like normal. Why is that?”

Echidna: “Dream world, would be an entirely figurative descriptor for it. This is a place constructed from the memories of the one who challenges the Trial’s, which drags in only the consciousness, a space fit to be called an alternate world. These are things withdrawn from you, from the challenger’s memories, so of course your senses can interact with this world. Conversely, if I attempted to touch the ground or perhaps the trees, I will not feel any tactile sensation.”

Emilia: “So that’s it... So I could go on a rampage, and turn the forest into a hodgepodge?”

Echidna: “What a barbaric and Witch-like idea. While it’s true that you have tactile sense, you cannot influence this world. To add, you and the living beings recreated in this world cannot even touch each other. Though, if the Trial were in another form then it would possible.”

Emilia: “Another form?”

Echidna: “Full of questions, aren’t you? How about using your own head for once? Seek and you shall find. Though for you, constantly spoiled and fawning on men as you are, I’d say it’s outside your capacity.”

Emilia: “Hmph.”

Emilia took the lead, the Witch of Greed following behind while keeping a fixed distance. Echidna sneered at Emilia’s ignorance while looking thoroughly unimpressed, while delivering a venomous lecture. But, despite that animosity, her statements were legitimate.

Emilia put her hand to her mouth and began thinking. There was a difference between touchable memories and untouchable memories. There was a method for Emilia, with only her mind present in this world, to touch the people who walk about these memories.

Emilia: “I thought about it, but I couldn’t get it. Tell me the answer.”

Echidna: “———”

Emilia: “What’s wrong? Do you have a tummy ache?”

Echidna: “Your attitude gives me pyrosis. While it certainly feels unpleasant, if you exclude him and my friends, the only one who can inspire such emotion in me is probably just you.”

Emilia: “Echidna, you have friends.”

“*How nice*”, was the nuance in Emilia’s mutter, to which Echidna sighed. It seemed she had not taken Emilia’s statement with the nicest of interpretations. Emilia hesitated on how to reword it to make it communicate properly, when——

Echidna: “The regrets of the past that you glimpse in the Trial do not consist of only a single scene for everybody.”

Emilia: “Hm?”

Echidna: “There are pasts fixed on a single moment of time which you regret. And differing from those pasts, there are also ongoing pasts where you regret your relationship with somebody, for example. For the latter, the recreated past will not be a single isolated scene, but will instead recreate those

characters as they are inside the challenger. You could speak with them, touch them, even make happy love with them.”

Emilia: “...Okay. So that’s how it works.”

Emilia nodded in comprehension.

Indeed, regrets could be distinguished like that. Some people might regret they got in a fight with somebody, and some people might regret everything that happened in the aftermath. Which to conquer was entirely dependent on the person.

Emilia: “You don’t like me, but you answered my question for me.”

Echidna: “Because I’m just sooo nice a person, is the kind of misunderstanding I’d loathe for you to make. I’ve done nothing humiliating enough for you to regard me favorably. That I wind up answering these questions is entirely a result of my disposition.”

Emilia: “Right, right.”

It didn’t put her in the most jovial of moods, but Emilia had more or less figured out how to interact with the icy Echidna. She definitely hated Emilia like one would hate a serpent, but Emilia could not bring herself to dislike Echidna. She didn’t know her well enough for that.

Reasoning backwards, it meant Echidna knew Emilia well enough to hate her that much— But she would have no chance to ask about it here.

???: “—Huhu! Ahahha! Here! This way!”

Emilia: “Eep!”

The sudden and loud voice of a young girl calling from behind surprised Emilia.

She froze as the little girl circled around her to run past from behind her to before her and away. It shocked Emilia that the girl had managed to come so close without Emilia noticing, but she promptly sensed that had not happened because of her own negligence or inattention.

The girl who overtook Emilia ran about, her long silver hair flapping in disarray.

Amethyst eyes, a well-worn children's vestment. She dashed confidently around the forest, her face very familiar to Emilia as she laughed.

This person was her young self— back when she knew no regret, Emilia in a bygone time.

Echidna: "Utterly ignorant, but it's still astonishing how dumbly blithe she looks."

Emilia: "Don't you start saying things about little me too. And... we'll find out soon whether or not that's anything bad."

Such was Echidna's prejudiced judgement of the frolicking young Emilia.

Feeling a throbbing in her temples after objecting to Echidna's appraisals, Emilia grimaced. Her Contract with Puck had ceased, and her sealed memories were resurrecting one after another. Her days spent with Mother Fortuna. Juice's group and how they brought supplies to the village.

The seal, and the fairies who helped her escape the Princess Room. And, the day on which she met Juice, who she wasn't supposed to meet, and the fact they became friends.

Emilia: "How did I manage to live without memory of these things, like it was completely normal...?"

Emilia's memory had been fraught with holes, but Emilia had lived without finding anything strange about that at all.

Who knows what would have happened had she noticed the pitfalls, but without the Trial's involvement? She would not have recovered from it. Perhaps Puck, who would've known Emilia's abnormal state better than anyone, hadn't told her about it because he understood that.

Pieces of her reviving memory still remained sleeping beyond the ajar door. She had not been able to spy their entirety before challenging the Trial, but that was fine.

Here, in the Trial, all of Emilia's sealed memories would likely be revealed.

She could figure something inside her would change definitively after she saw them.

Emilia: "But I'm not scared of that anymore."

Echidna: “Crying and bawling, you cling to men or your father. Are you going to stop making decisions typical of the filthy woman you are?”

Emilia: “I know they’d probably forgive me... But I don’t want to do that, and for me or for Subaru to feel disillusioned because of it. I don’t want to be weak and rationalize that I can stay weak.”

Echidna: “...Do whatever you want. All I’m doing is stockpiling yet another result in my memory.”

No matter how much spite Echidna spewed at her, nothing could shake Emilia’s nerve now.

Perhaps having perceived that over their conversation, Echidna resignedly closed her mouth. The Witch’s comments had abated in their fury. Emilia sighed, turning to devote her attention to her past.

In front of her was her young self, running about guilelessly. And,

???: “Please wait, Emilia-sama. It is perilous to traipse the area in this way.”

Young Emilia: “I’m not in danger, I’m fine. You’re the one with scraped knees, Juice.”

Juice: “Injury to myself is nothing to be concerned about. But any injuries you may sustain are dire. Not even my death would constitute recompense for wounds imposed on your sumptuous skin.”

Chasing the frolicking Emilia was a tall man in a black robe— Juice. His stern face held definite gentleness and affection as he softly chided Emilia, who continued frolicking, heedless of his warning.

???: “Juice. The way you said that actually made it sound reeeeeeeally dirty.”

Juice: “My intentions in speaking had been otherwise... Never would I consider Emilia-sama in such a manner.”

Juice was addressed by a woman following behind him as he himself followed Emilia—a woman with short silver hair, sharp eyes and beautiful looks.

Having spotted her, Emilia’s throat felt as it had cramped.

Emilia: “Mother Fortuna...”

Although she was aware that this healthy sight of her mother was only occurring in a memory, Emilia could not keep herself from feeling the urge to cry. Emilia had loved her. Had respected her more than any other. Even after all this time, Emilia considered Mother Fortuna a member of her family at least as precious as Puck.

Fortuna moved to stand beside the worried-looking Juice, casting him a glance.

Fortuna: “And that’s not just for Emilia, it’d sound that way no matter who you said it to. You’re supposed to be getting on in years by now, Juice.”

Juice: “Age is something which presents rather little significance to me. Related to having lived for a long duration of time, by my view even yourself and Emilia-sama would be infants.”

Fortuna: “I’m an infant by his view... Hm.”

Fortuna lowered her gaze, muttering with tones of displeasure. Juice’s brows furrowed in concern, but Fortuna did not respond. Instead, Emilia toddled back to them, her cheeks puffed out.

Young Emilia: “Aaagh! Mother Fortuna, Juice, how come you’re not chasing me! We’re playing tag! You have to chase!”

Juice: “Ah! My deepest apologies, Emilia-sama. The failing of this negligent Romanée-Conti, to persist lifelong and evermore...”

Fortuna: “Don’t spoil her like that, Juice— Emilia, you do remember why your mother and Juice started chasing you, yes? Girls who don’t think about what they have done reeeeeally annoy your mother.”

Young Emilia: “Eep!”

A hint of anger slipped into Fortuna’s smile, prompting young Emilia’s shoulders to hitch.

She thought back on why the two were chasing her, and realizes that she has needlessly riled a hornet’s nest. Her face paled, as she giggled in an attempt to draw attention away from the issue, then turned breaking into a run and—

Fortuna: “No luck. Mother Fortuna caught you.”

Young Emilia: “Uwah! I’m sorry, Mother Fortuna! It’s not what you think! The fairies wanted to play, and said to go outside, and so...”

Fortuna: “Girls who blame other people, or rather fairies, also annoy your mother. Do you understand, Emilia?”

Having been caught in a hug from behind, Emilia panicked as Fortuna spoke to her in whispers. Young Emilia stopped struggling, hanging her head in dejection.

Young Emilia: “I’m sorry, Mother Fortuna. The room was reeeally boring, and Juice is my friend, so I wanted to see him, and I just went out.”

Fortuna: “And then you ran away because I spotted you. You knew you did something bad. That was something you reeeally shouldn’t have done.”

Young Emilia: “I know...”

Fortuna: “You mustn’t break promises. Keeping promises is important. Promises are a representation of trust, and breaking them means betraying that trust. Don’t do it.”

Close to tears, Emilia attempted to look down— when her face was caught between two hands, being forced to look properly into that pair of amethyst eyes.

Fortuna: “Emilia, promise me. You’ll keep your promises from now on.”

Young Emilia: “Mmhm... Yes, I promise. I’m so sorry, Mother.”

Fortuna: “Alright. Everything’s fine then.”

Having heard Emilia’s teary pledge, Fortuna held her darling daughter to her chest. She tenderly caressed sobbing Emilia’s silver hair, accepting her child’s maturation with a gentle sigh. When—

Fortuna: “Juice? What are you doing over there?”

Juice: “I—I have... w—witnessed, far too brilliant a sight... The tears... beyond my control...”

Juice was squatting in the shade of a tree, as he pressed a handkerchief to his face, bawling. Apparently hearing that mother-daughter conversation had sent him over the emotional edge.

The visions of Juice crying both in her recovered memories and during the Trial led Emilia to remember that he was a real cry-baby. Warmth unfurled through her chest.

Fortuna: “But anyway, Emilia. These fairies you mentioned are...?”

Leaving aside Juice as he was blowing his nose with the hankie, Fortuna went back to a part of Emilia’s testimony which had bothered her. The topic of fairies raised, Emilia looked up at Fortuna from within her embrace, her eyes still red.

Young Emilia: “Oh, they’re... Fairies, come here.”

Young Emilia reached out her arm as she spoke to the world. As if her pale fingertips were a perch, several glowing lights appeared, drifting over to convene around her hand.

Both Fortuna and Juice looked shocked to witness the sight.

Fortuna: “It couldn’t be, Micro Spirits? And so many of them? How?”

Young Emilia: “—? I talked to them, and lots of them came out. They appear when I’m playing in the Princess Room now.”

Juice: “To command this sum of Micro Spirits at such an age Emilia-sama, it seems that you possess distinguishable aptitude for Spiritualism.”

Young Emilia: “A-pty-toode¹⁶⁸, for Spiritualism?”

Juice: “These who you call fairies are beings known as Micro Spirits. They exist ubiquitously throughout the world, and you can open your heart to them to converse and form a Contract. Those who are favored by Spirits, and borrow their strength to achieve the extraordinary, are referred to as Spiritual Arts Users.”

Young Emilia: “I can be one of those?”

¹⁶⁸ Childish mispronunciation. Adorable.

Juice: “Certainly. Proceed to mature in good health, favored by Spirits as you are presently... And undoubtedly, many Spirits, and more powerful Spirits, will come under your direction.”

Emilia’s face beamed with happiness as she heard Juice’s explanation. But Fortuna stood up, nudging her elbow into Juice’s side.

Fortuna: “Hold on, Juice. No funny talk. Don’t go off saying managing a few Micro Spirits makes you a Spiritual Arts User. And Emilia doesn’t need that.”

Juice: “So might be how you opine, but Emilia-sama shall not remain a child indefinitely. It will happen that she cannot stay at your side. My belief would find its additional necessity in her establishment of herself as herself once that eventuality comes.”

Fortuna and Juice were presently arguing over where Emilia’s education should be focused. Watching their exchange from aside, the older Emilia inevitably did think it.

Young Emilia: “Mother Fortuna and Juice are like a mom and dad.”

Fortuna: “Wha!?”

Without a trace of ill will in her expression, young Emilia stated the exact same thing that older Emilia had been thinking. Emilia watched Fortuna’s face redden while being convinced of the fact that, yes, her younger self had thought the same thing.

Fortuna: “Okay, Emilia, don’t say anything weird. Your mother and Juice have known each other for a very very long time, our relationship isn’t one you can talk about like that.”

Juice: “Exactly, Emilia-sama. Fortuna-sama and I have known each other for a very long time... In fact, it would have been since being in the company of your mother and father...”

Fortuna: “—Juice.”

Fortuna started rambling with frantic explanations, but Juice’s loose lips caused her tone to plummet. Juice seemed to sense his mistake, putting his hand to his mouth.

Juice: “Forgive me.”

Young Emilia: “Mother, and father?”

Fortuna: “I’m sorry, Emilia. We’ll talk about that another time. But anyway, you go back to the room. I haven’t forgiven the fact that you snuck out.”

Young Emilia: “Hmph... You’re so mean, Mother Fortuna...”

Feeling that Fortuna was trying to fudge the conversation, Emilia puffed out her cheeks to display her displeasure. But Fortuna appeared to be stubborn, and put her hands to Emilia’s puffed cheeks, pressing down to make her expel the air. With the air puffed out of Emilia’s mouth, Fortuna knelt down to match Emilia’s eye level.

Fortuna: “Be a good girl and behave. This will not be the last time you’re going to get to see Juice. I’ll, uhhhh... make another chance for you to see him.”

Young Emilia: “Really!? You promise? No going back on it?”

Fortuna: “Oh, no, this girl. Just where did she learn to be so fussy?”

Fortuna smiled wryly at Emilia as she brought up the topic of promises they had covered previously, before taking her in an embrace.

Fortuna: “Yes, I promise. This is a promise between you and me, and it’s reeeeeeally important.”

Young Emilia: “...Okay then. I’ll go back to the room.”

Young Emilia gives Fortuna a trusting nod.

Released from the hug, Emilia ran over to Juice before she made her return to the Princess Room. She extended her hand to Juice, smiling.

Young Emilia: “See you, Juice. Promise that we’ll meet again.”

Juice: “—Yes, assuredly. May we make audience again in the future. I shall be awaiting the day.”

Juice took the small, extended hand, completing the handshake. Her smile having been met with another, Emilia nodded and nodded and nodded before releasing her hand and announcing her goodbye.

Young Emilia then readied herself to return to the Princess Room—

Echidna: “Here they are.”

Whispered Echidna, having silently watched over everything until now.

Emilia heard Echidna clearly and raised her head, looking around to try and determine what Echidna is referring to— and then, she spotted it.

Emilia: “———”

A white young man.

White skin, white hair. He wore a simple shirt and pants, nothing ornate about him. His face did have its looks, but he was lacking in anything that would make him stand out, his appearance utterly banal. He would be able to mix into a crowd and disappear instantly, with how he epitomized all lack of individuality. But his presence right here, right now, made him seem an abnormal kind of outsider.

Fortuna: “...Who’re you!?”

In her memories, Fortuna also noticed the man, immediately holding Emilia close as she voiced her clear caution. In response to that voice, the man leant against a tree trunk, running his hand through his white hair.

Man: “Don’t you think it follows reasonable sense that when asking a person for their name, you begin by introducing yourself first?”

The reply made Fortuna’s eyebrow twitch. Seeing this, the man’s mouth twisted, the atmosphere he emitted dismal.

Man: “Who, is one of those questions where when you give this response, I can only think it as stale and trite but, now that I’ve actually wandered into a context fitting for that kind of thing, aha, I can indeed understand why people have the urge to say this. Here are fellow persons, making the presence of the other for the first time. Our standings are supposed to be definitively equal, as we begin in our efforts to establish a relationship, but now we have a condescending someone trying to extort a name

unilaterally. I wonder if it's occurred to you. That you're unconsciously, unsympathetically, and by your own accord treating me as inferior, has that occurred to you?"

Fortuna: "...For a man, you sure love talking."

Man: "For a man, is where your prejudice shows though and indicates how ignorant you are to comparative examples of men. And first of all, what right do you think you have to take these creatures called men, a class which includes more individuals spread throughout the world than what is conceivably countable, and compare me to them? This attitude of yours... it's giving me a little trouble to overlook. It's all lacking in any degree of reasonable courtesy. It's taking this individual I am, taking my rights, and disregarding them."

It appeared that Fortuna's every word had made the lunacy in the man's speech escalate. As the man's danger grew more and more, Fortuna exposed her wariness as she braced herself for combat.

But the one to pull the breaks is Juice, standing beside her. He looked up at the white man, his expression stern as he opened his mouth to speak.

Juice: "Regulus Corneas! For what reason are you here! We had an immutable promise that I would be the only one involved in this affair!"

Regulus: "Call it an immutable promise or call it whatever you want, it's all on you for going off saying things yourself and presuming things yourself in what is actually just a normal agreement. Look at you trying to push people into submission with that domineering phrasing of yours, what great and pompous drivel you've started spewing from your Spirit mouth. Trying to restrict my daily actions, even though I'm not permitted any kind of perfidious behavior anyway... So that's what a Spirit is? Have you ever considered putting a stop on the infringements you're making to my mind and person?"

Juice: "Nothing you say presents an answer! If you were displeased with the agreement, we could have discussed it at church! What have you appeared here for! And who told you that this place is..."

???: "—This has happened on my instruction."

Juice's voice trembled in rage as he yelled at the displeased young man, Regulus.

But cutting into their argument, never once before heard in this altercation, arrived a woman's voice. And everyone watching the scene had their own reaction to that voice.

A shiver arose in Juice's eyes, Fortuna's eyes blazed in fury, young Emilia shook her head as she tears up in her mother's arms, Regulus crafted an ominous smile. Emilia swallowed her breath as she watched the memory, while Echidna merely closed her eyes.

She stepped forward, this single girl.

This character standing beside Regulus as he looked down at Emilia, Juice, and Fortuna, was a girl so beautiful that all those who put their eyes on her would tremble. Her long, platinum hair gleamed sweetly as if they were sunlight given form, flowing to her slender neck and streaming down her back.

Long eyelashes bordered her eyes, their shade so deep a blue they seemed to entrap the world, her looks so overwhelmingly attractive that even a god would have hesitated to touch her fingers, all so perfectly delicate.

Her petite frame was adorable enough that even having the wind cradle her appeared risky. What covered her was merely a single white cloth, its whole aura suggesting the world would permit nothing else to touch her skin.

The presence she held was not that of an ordinary person, and her appearance was not what an ordinary person would have had. Her voice possessed an almost magical allure, binding the minds and bodies of those who hear it, so nobody present at that place could say anything, anymore.

Girl: "Is there something wrong? Archbishop Petelgeuse Romanée-Conti?"

Tilting her head, the girl conveyed her question.

Being looked at by her, being talked to by her. Just the fact that any one of her actions were aimed at oneself was enough to inspire an overwhelming euphoria, such that death would not have been an aversive prospect, the sensation unavoidable.

Although she knew that it was the past, Emilia felt her mouth rapidly going dry as she looked at the girl.

—This thing is dangerous.

Juice: “Why are you... No, Regulus Corneas! Why have you brought her here!”

Juice gritted his teeth, rejecting the emotions swelling up inside him.

—This thing, is dangerous.

Regulus: “Do you think it’s possible for me of all people to pull any such stunt like bringing people places with how it infringes on the will of others? It is by her own volition that we are in her presence. Your attempts to make all of this my fault are an amazing exhibition of prejudice. I’d appreciate you not to go off passing your unasked-for judgements on this human being that I am.”

Girl: “Archbishop Regulus. He is rattled. Do not fault him too much.”

The corners of Regulus’s mouth trembled in a frantic attempt to keep ecstasy from showing on his face as he bowed respectfully.

It was strange. Regulus was overwhelming, a being entirely alien. That he was so submissive, obeying her will, illustrated beyond any parallel how abnormal this girl is.

Juice looked up at the girl, his eyes trembling in shock and confusion as he shook his head.

Juice: “That is... remarkably, cruel... Pandora-sama...”

Juice’s breathy voice made the girl smile faintly. That girl’s smile, blessed by the world, harbinger of even greater felicity. The girl, Pandora, answered all gazes aimed at her with a tolerance that permitted everything.

She spread her arms wide, as if her small reach would cradle everything in existence.

Pandora: “Now, shall we begin? —For the fulfilment of cardinal desire of us Witch Cultists.”

Fortuna: “PANDORAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!”

With young Emilia sheltered behind her, Fortuna thrust out her arms to generate a blue magic circle before her. Icicles materialized with overwhelming momentum, their aim set directly on Pandora.

Pandora: “Goodness.”

Fortuna: “Be impaled, and apologize to my brother and the rest!!”

Pandora casually put her hand to her mouth, and Fortuna’s magic attacked. Each of the icicles was as large as an adult’s arm, their number nearing twenty. They formed at a rate fast enough to appear continuous, shooting one after another— spearing into the astonished girl, before exploding into white vapor.

Crackling of shattering ice rained upon crackling of shattering ice without end, the white smoke cloaking over the surroundings as Fortuna regardless relented for nary a second in her attack. Young Emilia’s mouth gaped open with Fortuna standing before her, her beautiful face twisted in rage as she hoisted up her arms.

Fortuna: “Aaaand now—!!”

Following the motion of her arms as she brought them down, a ball of ice massive enough to decimate the forest trees plummeted down from above. Its aim was true as it slammed into the spot where Pandora had been, white demise drilling itself into the forest ground, marking the girl’s grave.

Not even the older Emilia was able to say anything about Fortuna’s overwhelming magical prowess. Could Emilia, even while borrowing Puck’s power, be able to devise such powerful magic? She had never estimated her mother poorly, but learning her strength had been greater than what she remembered made her shiver. However—

Regulus: “Say... You were paying me absolutely no attention during any of that, were you? You weren’t paying me even the slightest thought and you still opted to entangle me in one of your attacks, honestly don’t you find that suspect? Do you know what it means...? What it means is that you infringed upon my presence, my life, my rights.”

Immediately following the prolonged complaint, the massive ball of ice shattered to pieces from the ground-up. The shards of ice-crystal scattered through the air, as if shards of a dream, the sight of Regulus casually standing there being overwhelming abnormal. Likewise, so was the sight of Pandora standing beside him, uninjured.

Regulus made a show of easily brushing off his coat; despite the ferocity of the attack he sustained not a single injury, in fact, not even his clothes had been sullied in the least. Pandora adjusted her bangs slightly, disrupted by air pressure as they had been.

Most likely Regulus, standing before Pandora, had protected her— but that was preposterous. Emilia had no clue as to what had just happened.

Echidna: “So that’s this generation’s Greed. Considering what an impossible fluke of a meeting it is for me to be witnessing this, it really is very fascinating.”

Emilia: “You know what that was?”

Emilia addressed Echidna, who had moved out of the tree-shade and into a spot where she could better observe the fight. Echidna glanced at Emilia, her eyes narrowing.

Echidna: “I can make a guess, but it’s far from anything definite. If we keep watching this for a little longer, I might be able to figure out what’s going on, but... It doesn’t seem that circumstances will allow for that.”

Emilia: “What do you...”

Echidna: “There they go.”

Although frustrated, Emilia directed her gaze forward. Even with Fortuna’s offensive, the fight had produced zero results and seeing Regulus stepping forward with a displeased look on his face, Juice stretched out his arm.

Juice: “Fortuna-sama, I ask that you take Emilia-sama and withdraw! We are presently powerless against Regulus Corneas!”

Fortuna: “You...! That woman is right there, and you’re telling me to stand down!?”

Juice: “Consider the situation! Who is it that you are protecting in this instant!”

Fortuna: “———!”

Juice bellowed at the belligerent Fortuna. Her face stiffens in shock as she glanced behind her, only to find young Emilia holding anxiously onto her mother's clothes.

Young Emilia: "M—Mother..."

Fortuna: "Emilia!"

Juice: "Please withdraw. From there, rescue the village. The followers who accompanied me to this place share me in my feelings. They will surely aid you."

Fortuna: "If we do that, what will you do?"

Fortuna bent down and held Emilia to her chest, while Juice spoke calmly. She stood up with Emilia in her embrace, looking anxiously at Juice.

Juice: "—Please calm your worry. I am not remaining behind absent of any plan."

Juice, although exuding tension, responded to Fortuna's concerned gaze with a smile. Seeing his expression, Fortuna closed her eyes to shake off her unease.

Fortuna: "I'm coming back to help you."

With that, Fortuna broke into a run through the forest, Emilia in her arms. Emilia struggled in her grip, peeking her head out from over Fortuna's shoulder.

Young Emilia: "Juice—!!!"

Juice: "——"

Juice turned to glance at Emilia, his expression somehow relieved as he raised his hand. With that, and with Fortuna and Emilia sprinting deep into the forest, Juice disappeared from the couple's view.

Emilia: "...It's strange. Me, I was taken away, so I shouldn't be seeing what happens here."

Echidna: "Don't disparage these worlds of memory I have constructed. Your memories may be the starting point, but the construction comes from my algorithms and takes reference from the Book of Wisdom. To an extent, it's simple to compensate for the events which you haven't seen. Although..."

Standing aside the bewildered Emilia, Echidna's gaze tracked the path of Fortuna's escape.

Echidna: "Speaking for the sake of overcoming your Trial, it's correct that we follow them. What do you think? Should we transition over?"

Echidna indirectly announced that Emilia was supposed to follow Fortuna. Which was a correct statement, rationally speaking. The Trial concerned Emilia's past, so whatever young Emilia was seeing and doing now should be prioritized. But—

Emilia: "Echidna... that kind of sounded like you're trying to make me go that way."

Echidna: "..."

Emilia: "Am I overthinking it... No, that's not it. Your phrasing and attitude just then were weird."

Echidna: "...Whatever you think is up to you. And besides, this side's moving again as well."

Echidna went without answering Emilia's question, her expression blank as she stepped back a small distance. Her retreat was probably to avoid getting showered any side-damages from the imminently-starting fight.

No matter how terrible the damage incurred, nothing would affect Emilia or Echidna. But if anything were to alter the surroundings, they could not avoid the impact the earth they are standing on.

Regulus: "Well wasn't that cool of you, Petelgeuse? But whose permission do you think you have to be doing these things? Do you have any idea at all why I'm here? Think about it in any way you can possibly conceive, and it's obvious I'm here on business. Not with you, with the other one. Getting in my way here means you're obstructing me from doing what I ought to do. It's infringing, my rights."

Juice: "Say anything you wish, Regulus Corneas. But, with my being at stake, I must not allow you any passage further!"

Regulus: "Well said. Not that I could give less of a care about you being one of the founders of the Witch Cult, but how wonderfully said, when some smidgen of past contributions was what landed you in the seat you're occupying. How can you possibly believe you have any hope of beating me, properly chosen into my seat as I am?"

Juice: "That... I will now present."

Regulus's anger intensified over the course of his egotistical strings of logic, to which Juice quietly responded. His hand reached into his robes, his expression steeled with determination. To Emilia, it looked the expression of a man resolved for death.

Emilia: "No... Juice, what are you doing!?"

Emilia's vicarious experience of her past had led her to remember her nickname for him. With the situation such that he was resolved for death, Emilia promptly reached out her arm in an attempt to stop him. However, there was no way for Emilia to influence the story of the past.

Her outstretched hand passed through him, feeling no touch of the palm that she had grasped in her youth.

Regulus: "That's..."

From his pocket, Juice withdrew a small, black box.

Regulus's brows furrowed at first, but he promptly seemed to guess its true identity as his eyes shot wide open. As Regulus showed shock for the first time, Juice's resolute gaze pierced through him.

Juice: "You should be able to feel it. Your hands have also held it once before."

Regulus: "I am aware. Very aware, and so my jaw's too busy gaping at your abject stupidity for me to speak. Perhaps you were keeping that hidden on your person thinking it'd be your ace or whatever else idea you've come up with, but couldn't you tell from the moment you had it anywhere near you? You! Are unqualified to have that! And it's not you, but the thing that's decided that!"

Juice: "...Indeed, I possess no compatibility with it. Owing to that, I have merely held what was entrusted to me and nothing else. However, it also serves for the sake of junctures such as these."

Pandora: "Archbishop Petelgeuse Romanée-Conti."

Juice responded quietly to the infuriated Regulus.

Pandora, not having moved an inch from her original spot, cut into their conversation. Pandora's face was tranquil as Juice raised his head.

Pandora: "Happy travels."

Juice: "-----"

No hostility or goodwill or ill will or anything, just simple words of blessing. And so being, Emilia could not prevent her horror, and neither could Juice. The blessing almost looked to have butchered Juice entirely as he grimaced, enduring the pain. He twisted the box in his hand, taking off the lid.

Inside the box upon his palm is a black, squirming "something".

Juice: "I beg you forgive me, Flugel-sama."

With that, Juice pressed both the dark something and the box to his chest. Instantly, the "something" snapped onto Juice's body like droplets of water, compounding in volume explosively to envelop him wholly.

It was as if Juice was being absorbed by some viscous creature. Emilia shrieked in silent grief as that "something" shrouded Juice's body, constricted him.

Regulus: "Imbecile."

For the first time, Regulus phrased his judgements succinctly, in a single breath. His scornful gaze was fixed on Juice, enveloped in the "something" as he lifted his arms to the heavens, his mouth agape and shrieking. Not as if in pain, not as if in joy, but as if some other emotion is throwing his being into disarray.

Emilia: "-----"

A baffling sound joined the shrieking.

The sound of someone clapping their hands.

Pandora: "Magnificent."

Whispered platinum Pandora as she gave her applause. As she watched Juice, swallowed and panting in the wake of a torrent of emotions, her cheeks had reddened in ecstasy. The slight hitch in her breathing was, unmistakably, because the scene is exciting her.

Regulus: “Pandora-sama?”

Emilia was not the only one with questions about Pandora’s attitude, as Regulus voiced the same thoughts. He furrowed his brows at the clapping Pandora. She glanced back at Regulus, her cheeks still red, aborting her applause to point at Juice.

Pandora: “Archbishop Regulus Corneas.”

Regulus: “Yes.”

Pandora: “He is coming.”

Instantly, Regulus flipped, hanging upside down, and was flung high into the sky overhead.

Regulus: “Wha—?”

It was the same kind of infantile violence as grabbing a doll by the leg and flinging the thing away. Regulus had not a clue as to what was happening either, making a dumb noise as he hit the apex of the throw— Only to slam back down to the earth. Having obviously transcended terminal velocity in his fall, it seemed that he had been thrown with his leg still grabbed by something.

Helpless, Regulus smashed to the ground head-first.

Out thunders the echoing boom as the earth burst apart, the trees caught in the crash falling and falling in sequence toward Regulus’s point of impact. The secondary attack pinned Regulus beneath the lumber, silence falling upon the forest.

Emilia fell speechless, her blank mind working frantically to figure out what on earth had just happened.

She had not seen a single thing. But supposing there was something she did make out—

???: “I am sure I did inform... Desu.”

Fallen to his knees and dressed in black clothing, blood streamed from the man's eyes as he gazed forward.

Glaring at the gaps between the trees and the rising plumes of dust, breathing ragged and having turned his resolve into a victorious bet, was this man.

Freed from the agony of being shrouded in black "something", he stood.

Juice— No. This man, was Petelgeuse Romanée-Conti.

Petelgeuse: "I will not allow you to pursue them... You shall not be allowed to pass from this point—
DESU!!"

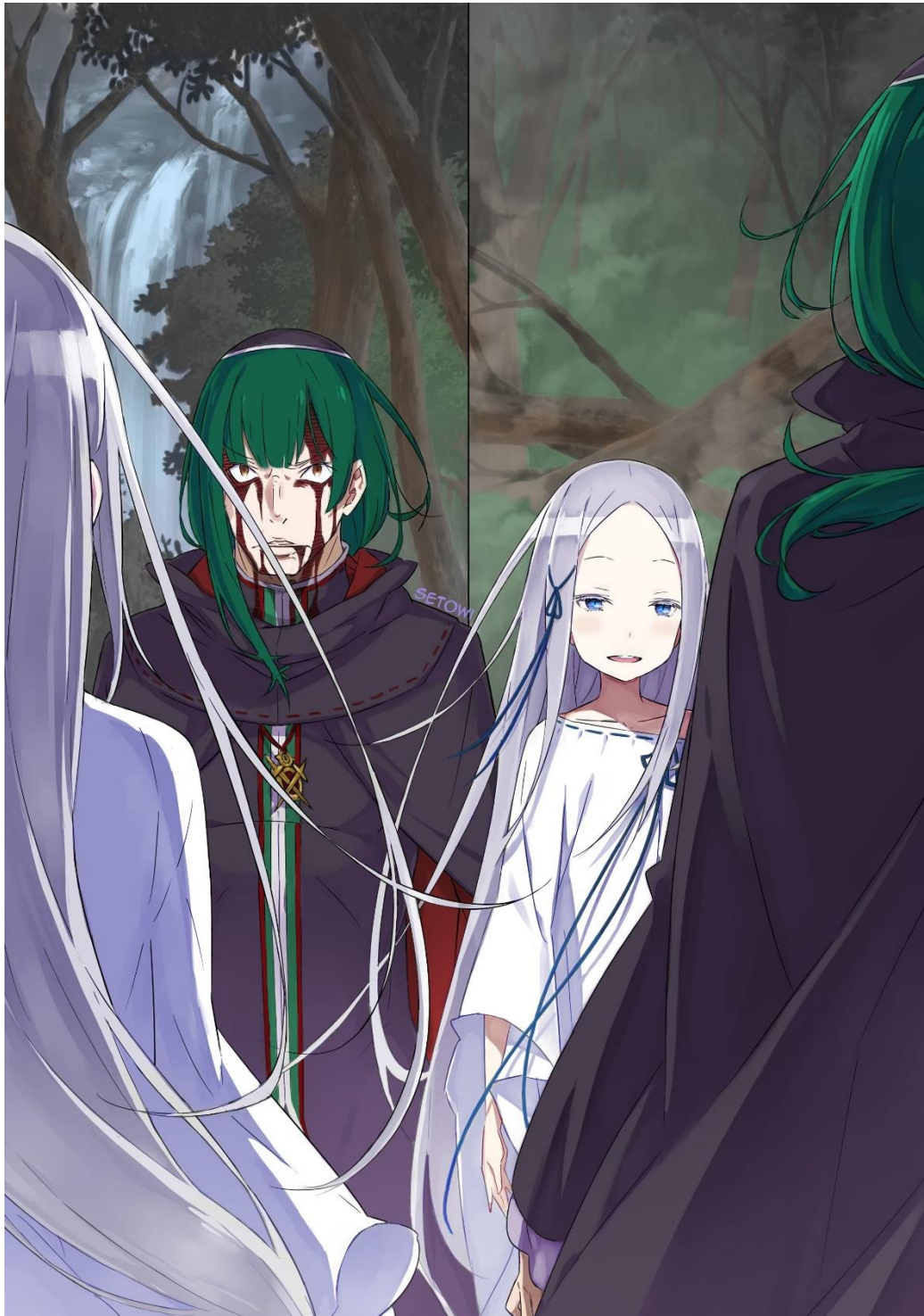


Illustration from Volume 14, coloring by Setowi ([source](#))

Arc 4 Chapter 119 - Back Then, Even Now, Love Unchanging

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 14, Chapter 3 “The Day Alpha Orionis Laughed”, Parts 2-3

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by SummaryAnon — [Complete](#), Page 19

Streaming tears of blood and gritting his teeth, Juice shrieked. Emilia could not stop the goosebumps from running down her spine.

Until only a moment before, a black “something” had been trying to subsume Juice’s body. It had stopped gorging on his outside, and was presently squirming within him.

Juice’s body spasmed, and pitched, beneath his black vestments. The blood seeping through the thick fabric suggested how gruesome his state was, and informed any witnesses of the unimaginable nightmare unfurling in his interior.

Emilia: “Juice...”

What on earth had Juice put inside him?

And what had been that attack that had toppled Regulus? It was like she couldn’t see what was happening, giving Emilia a sense of déjà vu. It was almost as if, just some moments prior, she had witnessed the exact same—

???: “You have proven your resolve magnificently. Archbishop Petelgeuse Romanée-Conti.”

A breezy female voice interrupted Emilia’s thoughts.

The one speaking calmly had been Pandora, looking down at Juice as he breathed raggedly and spit blood. Even while watching Regulus being shunted into the sky, her tranquil countenance had remained utterly unshaken.

Pandora: “You have done well to take in that Witch Factor, being that you are unqualified. With my name as Pandora, I confer to your resolve and to your ironclad will the seat of Sloth.”

Juice: “Do you believe that I desire any such seat? What I presently desire is merely one thing. Without a moment of regret for my sacrifice, the safety of that family!”

Fortuna and Emilia were gone from that warzone. Juice had resolved to stake his lifeblood on their escape. Pandora’s brows perked up in surprise, when a redness flushed her cheeks, her smile intoxicated.

Pandora: “Love. Very wonderful.”

Juice: “It is an emotion that you will never understand!”

Pandora, persistently transcended and aloof. Juice, prepared to fight to the end.

He supported himself painfully on one knee as he raised his trembling arm, forcing his bloody eyes wide as he screamed.

Juice: “Authority of Sloth— Unseen Hand!!”

Overwhelming pressure erupted from Juice’s position.

But Emilia’s eyes could not discern the nature of this force. Juice had merely extended his arm with a yell, yielding no visible changes in the world. Even so—

Emilia: “The forest’s being torn down!?”

Throughout the area surrounding Juice, as if beset by invisible serpents, the aftermath of destruction spread. Trees snapped, earth shattered, clumps of dirt and grass scattered through the air.

Juice: “Aaaa... aaaaAAAAAAAAAAH!!”

All while indiscriminately ravaging Juice’s surroundings, the destruction answered to his scream, directing its path toward Pandora. Although faced with demolition akin to an oncoming giant, trampling over the woods, she showed no indications of moving from that spot.

Therefore, the destruction proceeded on its course, capturing the small Pandora and—

???: “Say.”

Juice: “———!?”

???: “I came here, I am present here, so what do you think you’re doing in moving the situation along without paying the slightest of mind to me? Giving and wantless as I am, I think that now’s a suitable enough time for me to be angry.”

On the instant the invisible serpent was about to reach Pandora, a white figure cuts into the attack’s path.

His hair fluttering, Regulus’s raised hand had stopped the shockwave. An impact which would have killed any ordinary person washed over him as he simply stood there, absolutely nothing happening to him. Or even that was understating it. He had been slammed into the ground with a force strong enough to burst the earth apart, his body supposedly buried in the soil. But never mind injuries, there wasn’t even a speck of dirt on him.

Emilia: “No way...”

Her hand to her mouth, Emilia was speechless.

She could at least understand his safe return from Fortuna’s surprise attack. Had he been in possession of combat ability far exceeding that of Fortuna, it was possible that he had managed to defend against the lethal attack.

But Juice’s invisible strike presented a different story. There was no white fog to obstruct Emilia’s view this time— She had plainly witnessed Regulus being thrown into the air, and then slammed into the ground. He had, undefended, been slammed into the ground.

There was still some million in one chance that it hadn’t wounded him.

But the absolute lack of dirt or soil or whatever filth on him was beyond any explanation. There was some kind of trick, preventing attacks— no, preventing outside effects from influencing Regulus.

Juice: “Regulus Corneas!”

Regulus: “Can I say how unpleasant that is? The factor has not acknowledged you, and there you are ignoring your bodily collapse to force the thing into submission. You don’t think that’s an insult to us who reached our seats by way of proper process? That it doesn’t wound the unwavering speck of pride I have in myself?”

In line with the swing of Juice’s arm, Regulus’s face rebounded.

His neck rotated as if he had been punched, but when he promptly returned his head to proper position, not a trace of the blow besmirched his face. He simply furrowed his brows in displeasure, undefended as consecutive punches proceeded to batter him.

Echidna: “I don’t think staying here will show us any particular developments.”

Juice’s offensive to Regulus’ defensive as he mercilessly repelled the attacks continued.

Emilia watched her old friend staking his life in battle, and Echidna addressed her from behind. Emilia glanced back, glaring the expressionless Witch.

Emilia: “You’re telling me to leave? But look at what’s happening to Juice, how frantically he’s trying!”

Echidna: “Though, the question of whether his efforts are going to reach a desired result does leave some room for debate. And unfortunately, I have no intentions of debating with you. It doesn’t interest me to torment the weak, and hearing even one unimportant syllable out your mouth is the pinnacle of unpleasant.”

Emilia: “Then it should be fine for us to stay quiet and watch. I’ll—”

—Remain here, and see Juice’s resolve through to the end.

But as she started making that assertion, Emilia’s own heart kept her from saying anything. Her hand failed to touch anything at her chest, and so she recalled why she came here. It had been to challenge the Trial and overcome her past.

Emilia was currently witnessing her legitimate past, which she had wanted to forget.

Juice’s fight here had assuredly happened, and perhaps its outcome was what she ought to watch over, rather than what had become of Fortuna and young Emilia.

—But that would have been taking Subaru’s feelings, who had seen her off, and Juice’s feelings, who had attempted to secure Emilia and Fortuna’s escape, and betraying both of them.

What happened to Fortuna and Emilia after Juice presented them their escape?

She needed to unearth more of her slumbering, unrecovered past, and reveal the answer.

Echidna: “It seems like even your deficient brain can understand which decision is wiser.”

Emilia: “...You’re right. Let’s follow me and Mother. Will Juice...?”

Echidna: “Don’t worry, it’s a battle between Archbishops of Sin. The scales won’t tip in either direction so easily. It’s another story supposing someone else joins the fight... But it’s inconceivable that she would involve herself in battle anyway.”

The ferocity of Juice and Regulus’ fight compounded.

Blood trailed from Juice’s eyes, his nose, his mouth. The unseen destruction he manipulated shot up in accuracy and force, parallel to the increasing destruction of his insides.

But Regulus remained so unchanged and ordinary it was abnormal. The destruction showering his undefended form, he merely stood there with a bored expression, looking down upon Juice’s resistance.

It felt like if he chose to go on the offensive, the situation’s trend would instantly shift.

Pandora: “Haaaaaa...”

Echidna’s gaze was directed at Pandora, heart racing and expression aroused.

Indeed, it seemed that she was not going to involve herself in the fight. A beautiful girl faced with an abnormal battle, panting rather sexually— but disregarding all that strangeness—

Echidna: “I’m changing the scene— To you and your mother, escaped into the forest.”

Emilia: “—Uh.”

Following Emilia’s conclusion, Echidna raised her hand and clicked her fingers.

Everything in Emilia's vision warped as the forest scenery shifted, the false feeling of the ground beneath her feet being covered over with something new abruptly leading her to stumble.

She raised her head. No destruction had reached this familiar spot, nor this section of the forest.

???: "No! Mother, no! Please don't leave me!"

Hearing the shrill voice of a crying child, Emilia jerked her head up.

In front of her was a familiar tree, its inside hollowed out and re-purposed into a room large enough to shelter a small child— it was what her young self and her mother had called the Princess Room.

Right outside its entrance, Fortuna and crying young Emilia were talking, Emilia clinging to Fortuna's chest. Fortuna grasped her daughter's shoulders, frantically—

Fortuna: "Please listen to me, Emilia. Everything's okay. I'll come... Yes, I'll deal with this quickly and come right back. So please stay hidden here while I'm doing that. Please."

Young Emilia: "No! I don't wanna! Mother Fortuna, you're making a face like Juice's! Like Juice did, what're you gonna do! L—leaving me, what're you... going to..."

Emilia's little hands gripped desperately to keep her mother from escaping.

Fortuna was easily capable of untangling herself from a child's grip if so she desired. Her reasoning for not cruelly untangling herself from Emilia's hands was evidenced by her amethyst eyes, as she gazed at Emilia.

Fortuna was Emilia's mother. So she could not bat away the hands of her crying, clinging daughter.

Young Emilia: "Don't leave me! Let me be with you! I won't tell lies anymore! I won't break promises! I'll be a good girl, I'll be a good good girl... so don't leave, me..."

Fortuna: "Emilia... Emilia, Emilia, Emilia!"

Not wanting to be separated from her mother, and willing to sacrificing everything so that she did not have to separate from her mother, Emilia shrieked. Fortuna, her expression breaking down with emotion,

hugged her daughter tight. If she did not press her daughter's face to her chest as she had done, she would have seen it.

Her daughter would have seen her mother's expression, seen the overflowing and unceasing tears, seen the teardrops wetting her mother's cheeks.

Emilia: "Mother, Fortuna..."

Young Emilia had not seen her mother crying, but older Emilia clearly did.

Emilia had never imagined that her perpetually noble, marvelous, strong, respectable, not-weak-in-the-slightest mother, had ever been so wounded and struck with such sorrow she would shed such feverish tears.

As she watched her mother cry, the onlooking Emilia hit her limit.

Unable to put her hands to her cheeks in time, the tears in her eyes appeared one after another.

Having seen this, having seen her mother's face in this instant, she understood. It was not that she had ever doubted it, but truly, at that second, she was again convinced.

Emilia: "Mother Fortuna... was, my real mother..."

Her birth mother, whoever she was, did not hold any significance to Emilia anymore. As if Fortuna's insistence on the fact she was just a substitute could ever make Emilia forget Fortuna was her real mother.

Although spoken by her most precious and respected Mother Fortuna, those words alone were ones Emilia could not accept.

Emilia: "I love you, Mother Fortuna..."

As if anyone was able to say anything that would have made that feeling bend.

???: "Fortuna-sama—!"

A man's voice called out to Fortuna from behind as she held Emilia close.

Fortuna wiped her face with her sleeve, hiding her torrent of tears as she turned to face the speaker. Her gaze landed on an elf man in a lightweight dress.

He was one of the elves living in this village, and someone who Emilia knew as well.

Fortuna: “Archi, how is the village?”

The man ran over while Fortuna questioned him in a regular voice. The man, Archi, looked to have noticed that Fortuna was crying, but refrains from touching on the topic and shook his head.

Archi: “It’s the same everywhere. The Archbishop’s subordinates and the village’s men are reciprocating the fight, but...”

Fortuna: “Isn’t looking good, then.”

Fortuna lowered her gaze, biting her lip at the poor state of the battle. Emilia looked anxiously up at her mother, saying nothing as she gripped her clothes, trembling. Archi notices her shaking, and—

Archi: “It’s okay. Don’t be so scared, Emilia. Believe in all us villagers and us adults. And besides, your mother is a very strong, very scary person.”

Young Emilia: “Mm, mm...”

Fortuna: “Archi, was that «scary» really necessary? Geez...”

Fortuna crossed her arms in indignation, but she did nod to Archi’s roundabout words of consideration. “We can’t stay utterly pessimistic about this”, she thought, gazing at the Princess Room.

Fortuna: “Hiding her here won’t work anymore.”

Archi: “Frustrating as it is, staying in the forest means they will find her before long. Could their goal be...?”

Fortuna: “It’s likely that it is the seal deep in the woods. Where did they find out about it? And even that woman!”

Fortuna seemed to have particular hostility toward Pandora's presence as she bit her lip in frustration, before shaking her head resolutely.

Fortuna: "It's fine, but anyway, I'm going. I'm the strongest fighter in this forest, this isn't the time for me to be dragging my feet."

Archi: "No! We will be the ones to fight! Fortuna-sama, you take Emilia and exit the forest!"

Fortuna: "What will running away accomplish? We will have our peaceful lands stolen from us... that logic isn't going to stop me. Us losing isn't the problem here. The problem here is having them disclose the seal¹⁶⁹!"

Fortuna riposted back Archi's yells with an even stronger tone. And then, embarrassed she had snapped back at him, she said "I'm sorry", and continued—

Fortuna: "I know you resent me. There was honestly no reason for all of you to get wrapped up in this. When Emilia and I came here... we placed burdens you did not need."

Archi: "No! As if there could possibly be any one of us who thinks that!"

Fortuna: "Archi..."

Archi responded ferociously to Fortuna's regretful voice, as if that alone had been something he could not allow her to say. His face reddened, his long elfin ears tapering back in fury.

Archi: "Please stop constantly excluding us from your problems! With our long lifespans, perhaps it may have only felt like the blink of an eye... but even so! We spent the same time together, saw the same things together! Have you forgotten that!?"

Fortuna: "——"

Archi: "Who could possibly think ill of you! When you consider what great debts we owe to you, to your brother... to Emilia's mother, how could you ask that we shamelessly forget what we owe!"

¹⁶⁹ Note from SummaryAnon: "The most common meaning for the word used for «disclose» is «exposing something hidden to the public», but has a second meaning of «graverobbing». On reflection, if you take it extremely literally «disclose the seal» works fine for both meanings. Wonders of language."

His emotions detonating, Archi pleaded with Fortuna while practically in tears. The still-young elf breathed raggedly as he fell to his knees, sniffing as he looks up at Fortuna. She closed her eyes in silence.

Fortuna: “I’m sorry— Once again, I’ve invalidated the family I live with.”

Archi: “Fortuna-sama... I... I may have, said too...”

Fortuna: “No, it was important that you did. I’m sorry, Archi. And thank you.”

Fortuna gave Archi, who was kneeling, her thanks, and presented him her hand. After a moment of hesitation, Archi took Fortuna’s hand and quietly stood back up.

Then Fortuna turned back to face young Emilia.

Fortuna: “Emilia. Your Mother has an important role to play, she has to protect everybody. We’re going to be separated for just a little bit.”

Young Emilia: “D—don’t, Mother. I... I...”

Fortuna: “Please. It’s only for a little bit, so please listen. Go with Archi, and leave the forest. This forest is... going to be reeeeeeally dangerous soon.”

Speaking to Emilia, who was bordering on tears as she shook her head, Fortuna glanced back to Archi. Her determined amethyst gazes made Archi’s skinny body go rigid.

Archi: “For—Fortuna-sama... I,”

Fortuna: “Archi. You’re still young, you still have a future. Please take Emilia, and... I know it’s a hard world to live in, but there has to be hope.”

Archi: “I... Don’t say these things like it’s the end! I—I’m staying in this forest to the last, with everybody!”

Fortuna: “Please, Archi. Emilia... she’s my, my brother’s, my sister-in-law’s, daughter.”

Archi: “———!”

This was merely the voice of a frail woman, absent of Fortuna's usual strength and nobility. Hearing the voice of this woman and mother, Fortuna, tears streamed down Archi's face. Arch buried his face in his hands as he sobbed.

Archi: "It isn't fair...! When you hear something like that, you know it's impossible for me to refuse...! I... want to fight with everyone! But...!"

Fortuna: "I'm sorry. For pushing everything onto children, please forgive us."

Fortuna put her hands on the shoulders of the crying young elf, begging for forgiveness. Arch could not say anything, but accepted Fortuna's request silently.

And now, it was only young Emilia that Fortuna had left to persuade.

Fortuna: "Emilia."

Young Emilia: "No! I, I wanna be with you, Mother! Please! I ask please! Please, let me be with you! I don't wanna, be alone..."

Fortuna: "You're not alone at all. Listen closely."

Emilia bawled with an unreceptive attitude. She put her hands over her ears, trying to shut out every word of her mother's goodbye, which made older Emilia want to pull her young self's cheeks taut.

Not to punish her for disobedience. But so that a single syllable of any of the words that Fortuna was going to speak would not escape her.

Fortuna: "Emilia."

Crouching down, Fortuna embraced Emilia.

She took Emilia's arms in her grasp, stopping her from plugging her ears, and when her daughter acted out by pressing her head against her, Fortuna nuzzled her cheek against her daughter's silver hair. As if she was touching something, someone, more beloved than any other, taking care so that they would not break.

Fortuna: “Your Mother is always right there with you. Right there when you close your eyes, in your memories. Right there when you cradle yourself, in your heart as it grows warm. Right there when you call out, beneath the same sky that your voice echoes. You and Mother are always together. Always, always, forever... together.”

Young Emilia: “Liar. Liar, liar, liar... You’re lying, Mother...”

Fortuna: “Emilia— Promise.”

Fortuna looked at Emilia in the eye, while she attempted to discard her mother’s words as being mere consolation. However, the word “promise” made Emilia swallow her breath, and hold her mouth.

Having been led by Fortuna’s gaze to her outstretched palm, young Emilia too, placed her palm to Fortuna’s.

Fortuna: “Emilia and her Mother will always be together. That’s what I promise you.”

Young Emilia: “Y—you’ll, really... be with me?”

Fortuna: “Yes, really. More than anyone else in the world, your Mother reeeeeeally loves you, Lia.”

That tender call, Lia, caused the dam of tears for young Emilia, for old Emilia, to burst. Sobbing and bawling, two Emilias of present and past.

Young Emilia: “Mother Fortuna... L—love you too... love you, love you...”

Emilia: “I love you. I love you, Mother Fortuna. Love you, sooo much, love you, treasure you...”

The emotions of the two Emilias overlapped, as they frantically answered to the love given to them.

They strained their voices, pressed their bodies close to her, to show that if they did otherwise, they would fail to convey, fail to express, all those feelings in their hearts.

Fortuna: “I love you, Lia.”

On her cheeks, eyelids, forehead, Fortuna’s soft warm lips touched her.

Although she had been permitted to share touch, to share embrace, Fortuna had been late to learn how to express love as a mother, and had never done such things— Which made the present moment the one in which Fortuna truly, from the bottom of heart, first accepted herself as being Emilia’s mother.

Fortuna: “—I’m counting on you, Archi.”

Archi: “...Understood.”

Having conveyed her absolute love to her daughter, Fortuna stood and called for the young man. Arch received the bawling Emilia from Fortuna, holding her firm, and gave a great bow to Fortuna.

Fortuna: “Get away safely.”

Archi: “I will... Yes, I will! I won’t let Emilia... I won’t let this girl be hurt by anybody!”

Fortuna’s cheeks relaxed in relief, then pointing to a road deeper into the forest.

Fortuna: “That way. I’m begging you.”

Archi: “———”

Arch said nothing further and broke into a run, in the direction Fortuna was pointing.

In his hold as he sprinted through the forest, Emilia peeked her head out from behind his shoulder— to sight her mother as she grew distant. She cried out, but her screams went unvoiced.

Fortuna’s sharp eyes soften so tenderly—

Fortuna: “—I love you, Emilia.”

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Being held by Archi, Emilia looked frantically in the direction where her mother had disappeared.

As if she was begging that her vanished mother would reappear, she went on, her gaze fixed. As if she was hoping that perhaps she would come to follow them.

Archi: “Emilia!”

Emilia’s stubborn heart communicated well to Archi as he held her small form. Archi’s face turned into a mess as he considered what to tell her young heart, having been separated with Fortuna.

Echidna: “—I’m surprised.”

Said Echidna to Emilia, the two running side-by-side in pursuit of Archi.

Still affected by the parting with her mother, and not quite suppressing her weeping, Emilia questioned Echidna using only her gaze, to which the white-haired Witch shrugged.

Echidna: “You did not stay behind, and followed your past self without hesitation. I was certain that it’d be like before when watching Sloth, that you’d prolong the scene with your mother so girlishly.”

Emilia: “...I know I told you earlier. I’m here to watch my past through! Mother, and Juice, and everyone... That’s why they...”

Echidna: “Mhm, mhm. Said something unasked for, didn’t I?”

Looking like she did not get the answer she wanted, Echidna shook her head. Even Emilia was becoming irritated with Echidna’s callousness, but before she could mention it, young Emilia buried her face in her hands.

Young Emilia: “Why? Why? How, come this... happened? I—it’s, because I... I, broke my, promise... and left the, room...”

Archi: “No. No, Emilia. It’s not your fault at all! It’s not Fortuna-sama’s fault, it’s not anybody’s fault! There’s no need to blame yourself!”

Young Emilia: “But then, how come? How come, we’re separated? Mother... and Juice too, how come... Do, do they hate me? Lots of, heaps of people, hate me so, this’s why it...”

Her incredibly sudden parting with Juice and Fortuna has cornered Emilia’s heart so that it was close to breaking. Thinking back on what foreboded this situation, and on her own actions, young Emilia sunk into a sea of self-invalidation.

She had broken her promise. She had left the room she was not meant to leave. She knew about the seal she was not meant to know about. It looked like her own deeds had been the cause for everything that was happening.

Young Emilia: “Should I... have stayed there, stayed in the room? If I did, would, nobody be gone... and I could, be with everybody?”

Archi: “Emilia...”

Young Emilia: “Was, I a bad girl...? Is everybody, in the world going to, hate me... and, I’ll be alone?”

Archi: “No... No, Emilia! Nobody, there’s nobody out there who hates you. The world isn’t here to hurt you. The world’s here so that everybody can celebrate you!”

Arch frantically tried to persuade the bawling Emilia. Part of it was an attempt to stop Emilia’s crying, but a larger part was much like a wish— because he himself would have liked to believe it.

Archi’s shouts struck older Emilia’s heart. It wasn’t just Fortuna and Juice. He and the other villagers had all protected her, loved her, reached out to her to make sure she was not alone.

It was not until this exact instant that she truly remembered. It had always, always been like this.

???: “You over there—!”

With a sharp shout, somebody slipped into the space before Archi as he ran.

The black-robed character jumped out from a gap between the trees, which prompted Archi to stop immediately, his gaze growing wary. But the man raised his hands in response.

Man: “Wait, don’t panic! I’m one of Archbishop Romanée-Conti’s fingers!”

Archi: “The Archbishop’s...!”

Hearing Juice’s name from the breathless man in robes made Archi’s face look relieved. The man approached after seeing that Arch had lost his wariness, and noticed Emilia.

Finger: “That girl... Then, Fortuna-sama couldn’t possibly be...?”

Archi: “There is no need for concern. She’s... She has merely entrusted me with Emilia, and left us together. Fortuna-sama is the most skillful of any of us in the village. She will surely defeat the trespassers, and...”

Finger: “...Though I find this hard to state, I’m afraid that’s a difficult prospect.”

The man lowered his gaze, his voice weak, a complete shift in attitude. Arch raised his brows, to which the man sighed, his expression grave.

Finger: “We have confirmed the presence of the Archbishop of Greed, and our Archbishop has entered combat with him. Were that the only problem, and we repelled the extremist members of the faith, it would have been possible for us to drive them away, but...”

Archi: “Some other issue has...?”

Finger: “—A Witchbeast. The Black Serpent has been loosed in the forest.”

Archi: “———!?”

Archi was visibly stunned by the man’s words. He shook his head in disbelief, gesturing to the forest.

Archi: “That’s ridiculous, impossible! The Black Serpent is even less controllable than the White Whale or Great Rabbit! It’s not like the White Whale, under Gluttony’s command, or the Great Rabbit, whose course can be guided... the Black Serpent is just a natural disaster which listens to nobody! A catastrophe among catastrophes! How!”

Finger: “...Pandora-sama of the Witch Cult has accompanied him. Pandora-sama cannot go so far as to control the Black Serpent with her authority, but she can lead it to a destination.”

Archi: “Pandora? That isn’t a name I’ve...”

Finger: “She exists in secrecy! In the Witch Cult she is taboo not to be spoken, neither by the Archbishop-sama’s faction of moderates¹⁷⁰ nor by the extremists. Now she has come here.”

¹⁷⁰ Might not be clear from the way it’s worded, but this passage is implying it’s a moderate faction led by Petelgeuse.

Archi's shock kept him from saying a single word.

Archi's failure to sink into despair resulted from the heartbeat of the life in his arms. Results from his knowledge that he was not permitted to be pessimist.

Archi: "Fortuna-sama has request that I shall lead Emilia to her escape. Regardless of what may happen to the forest, this girl... this hope, must be protected!"

Finger: "...I will accompany you. Although I cannot say how much this frail person of mine can assist."

Archi's persistent will to fight led the man's crestfallen look to recover its determination. He cast his robe open, revealing rather stout muscled legs for his age, breaking into a run as he took the lead along the path out of the forest.

Finger: "We'll proceed while taking care to avoid the extremists. Now, if we can just exit the forest, prospects should be—"

—Brighter. But in that exact instant, something entangled the leg of the man in the lead, making him topple into the ground. He fell onto his side as Archi cried out, running towards him in a panic. But the man shouted to the approaching Archi.

Finger: "Stay back!!"

Archi: "———!?"

Finger: "My blunder... but to think it came so quickly!"

The man, holding back Archi, raised his fallen body. But, that was all he did. His legs, for some reason, did not move an inch. Because, beneath his overturned vestments, marks like black burn wounds engraved his exposed shins.

Finger: "It's the evil tongue of the Black Serpent! Run!"

Archi: "But——!"

Finger: "I am already beyond saving..."

The man's face rapidly began to change in appearance. His skin from the neck up steadily drowned in marks like black spots, the eyes of his gentle-looking face bulging open, eyeballs close to falling out as his face sank into his skull.

His fingers clawed at his mottled neck, his mouth spilling massive quantities of yellow froth.

Finger: "Blugh, guhbgluh... Ahguh, bgeh..."

Immediately following his agonized moan, his eye sockets, his nostrils, his ears, his mouth, every single orifice began leaking with dingy blood, strangling his life to nothing as it gushed away.

As both Archi and Emilia were subjected to witnessing that pitiful death, neither could keep their usual composure. Even Echidna's expression looked scrunched up in pain.

Archi: "Crucible of Pestilence... Witchbeast of Blight, the Black Serpent!"

His voice strained, Archi stated the name of the man's killer, the beast.

While it may not have responded to its name, the forest that had been silent except for Archi and Emilia's breathing abruptly became a host to another noise.

—The sloshing, of a large animal licking its lips.

—The slithering, of something long and thin crawling across the earth.

The noise was on a ridiculously incorrect scale, its nature hard to pin down accurately. But it nearly resembled the noise of a serpent faced with prey, its tongue flicking out, as it squirmed across the dirt.

Archi: "—Shit!"

Having guessed the true identity of the sound, Archi belatedly realized that himself and Emilia were right in the middle of the Black Serpent's hunting ground. Although aware that yelling only put them at an disadvantage, he had to yell. He could think of no other methods to rebel against the thing.

Although unsure of where to run, Archi sprinted away from the man. He had not a single thought for Fortuna's directions no longer. Right now, he had to escape from this threat. Right now, he had to protect that what ought to be protected.

The frantic resistance of that young elf—

Archi: “Agh—”

—Was cruelly crushed as a vile, black tongue ensnared his right ankle.

The areas of bare skin which the tongue had licked had been besmirched with dark, mottled burn scars. The instant he recognized aw, Arch aimed his open palm at his foot.

Archi: “...Fula!!”

Without hesitation, he fired a blade of wind to sever his scarred leg from the shin down. He had lost his footing, and so he propped up his falling body on a tree trunk. Blood spurted from him, the agonizing pain soldering his brain as he endured, gritting his teeth so hard they caused him severe pain.

Archi: “Humaauh...!”

A crack sounded through the air as Archi’s severed stump began freezing over. White mist rose, Archi shrieking as he forced his bleeding to stop.

His gruesome deeds stunned older Emilia silent. Instant decisions, counteracting the pain. And his strength of heart, as he had not released Emilia from his hold even after all of this.

Young Emilia: “Archi...?”

With her head pressed to his chest, young Emilia had not witnessed Archi’s actions. Neither did Archi possess any intention in the least to let her see them.

Even with his face covered in cold sweat, he gave Emilia an awkward smile.

Archi: “It’s... nothing... I’m... all fine!”

Although his speech was faltering, Archi replied so he would not let Emilia sense there was something wrong. But cruel fate ridiculed evermore the spirit of this noble man.

His leg had been severed, his frantic deeds done to plug the bleeding of his stump— as the uninjured portions of his frozen leg looked as they were drying up, fissuring like a plane of earth bereft of water, the damage spreading.

It was as if Archi's leg was dying like a dry wasteland. And it wasn't stopping at just the leg.

Archi: "...Emilia. Do you see the white flowers between those two trees?"

Young Emilia: "...Mm."

Archi squatted down, the tree supporting his back. Standing on solid ground, Emilia looked in the direction Arch was pointing at, and nodded as she spotted the white flowers.

Arch wiped the sweat from the brow, hiding his agonized expression—

Archi: "Can, you run to those flowers? Run, past the flowers... Go straight... Go straight, ahead..."

Young Emilia: "I, can. I can. But..."

Archi: "Then, get running—"

Although confused, young Emilia now recognized Archi was in incredibly irregular straits, her amethyst eyes wavering.

Wavering because she would be alone. Because again, she would lose someone.

Archi: "Everything's okay. Emilia, you, won't be alone..."

Young Emilia: "Archi..."

Archi: "Now, run off. No matter what you hear, don't look back... Run!"

Archi's sharp command made Emilia's shoulders hitch, and with that, Emilia ran. She withstood the urge to look back, instructed as she had been not to do it.

Archi's words, Fortuna's words, Juice's words, all echoed through Emilia's brain.

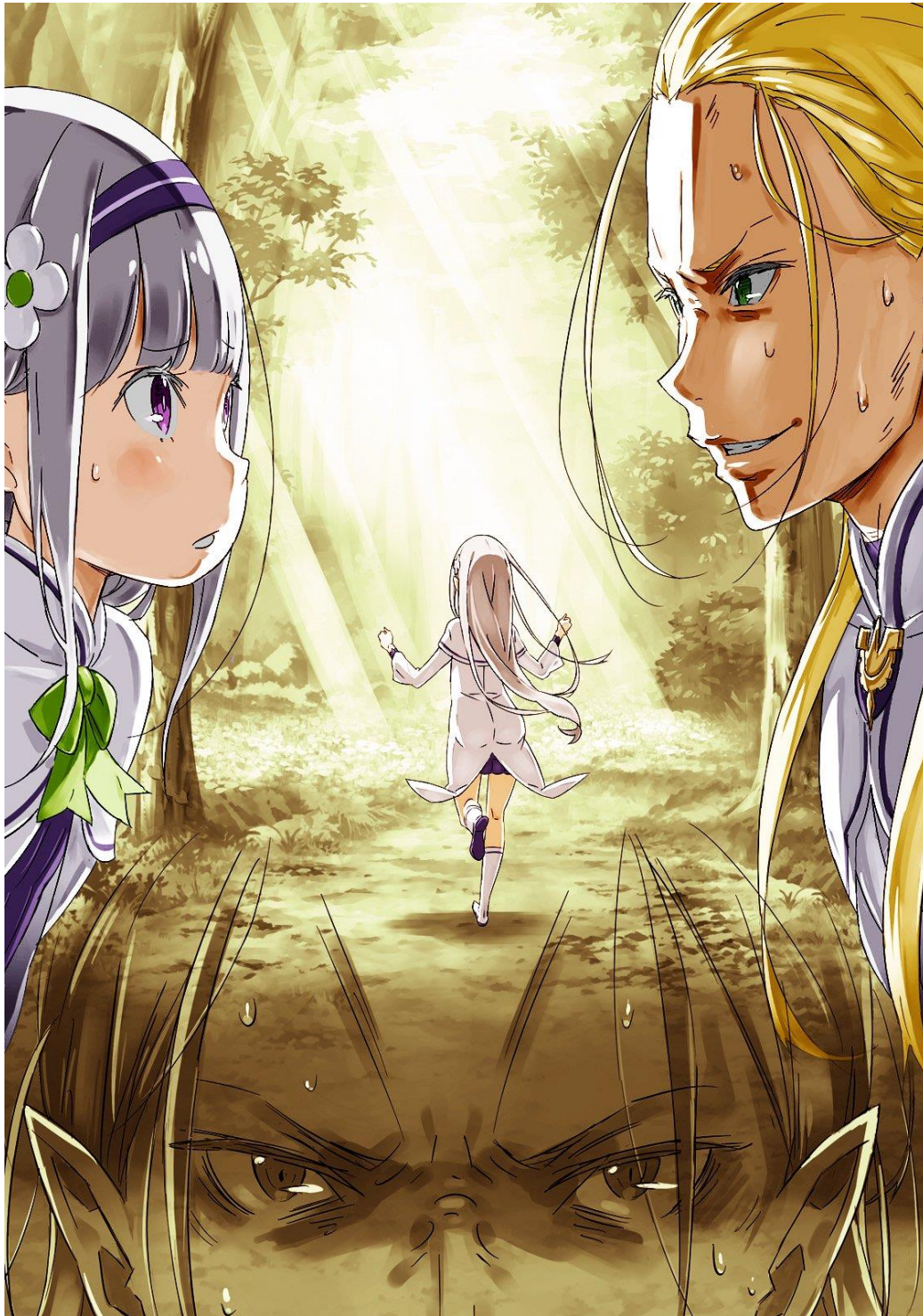


Illustration from Volume 14, coloring by DdukaE ([source](#))

So that she could believe that if she did everything as she was told, everything would go back to normal. So that she could convince herself that following instructions was the only hope she currently had.

Running away, leaving him behind, Arch watched Emilia disappear into the direction of hope. He exhaled deeply and rolled up the sleeve of his jacket. The dehydration had already covered his legs and waist, and had reached as far as his abdomen. He could move neither of his legs, and in fact it seemed that just touching them would be enough for them to shatter and disintegrate.

Once the dehydration reached his chest and got to his heart, what would happen?

He heard the slithering of the beast, licking its tongue in the face of prey.

He heard a slithering noise like it was plotting to take the fleeing girl, the forest's hope, the significance of Archi burning away the faint flickers of life he had left.

Archi: "Like anyone could let you get away..."

The slithering stopped its retreat. As if it had regained interest in the still-living prey.

The noise approached. Meaning that although he sensed that the end was approaching, Archi's cheeks relaxed. The fact that death was looming in on him meant that death was growing distant from the girl.

Archi: "I know she'll be okay, Fortuna-sama."

The end slithered closer.

He heard it, and although exposing himself to mortal danger beyond parallel, Archi's pride in his achievements caused him to smile.

Archi: "-----"

That smile, even though parched arid, would remain without ever going dry.

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—Emilia had long passed the white flowers.

Young Emilia: “Haaa... haaa... haaaaaaa...”

Her breathing hitched as she demanded long strides from her little legs while dashing through the forest.

All while thinking about her mother and Juice and Archi, focused on the idea that running in the direction Arch had indicated was the best thing she could do, unwilling to consider anything else.

Young Emilia: “Aaaahh... Uwaaaaaah!”

She shook her head.

The tears flowed. Desperately, she kept the sobs from pouring out her lips.

What was happening, and why was it happening? Everybody knew something, and she did not know anything.

She did not know what to do, did not know a thing. Was there nothing she could do?

Who were the people attacking Fortuna, Juice, Archi, and the others? What could she do that would make them go away? For what goal had they—

Young Emilia: “The, siel¹⁷¹...”

That was it.

Fortuna and Arch had mentioned something. And Juice’s talks with Fortuna had surely indicated that the object was something important. Meaning, their goal was?

Young Emilia: “—Ah!”

As she ran, Emilia’s feet suddenly hit nothing but air, and losing sight of the ground, she came to realize she had entered a basin sloping downwards.

¹⁷¹ Same as in the previous volume: “Emilia mispronounces “fuuin” (封印) as “fu-in” (フーイン). Let’s keep that adorable childish mispronunciation because why not”.

She immediately reached out to try and stop herself, but the steep incline did not aid the small girl, and on the heels of her momentum, Emilia tripped, tumbled, fell.

Normally, she would have cried from the scrapes and bruises and stood back up.

But this time, with both her body and mind entirely fatigued, the strike of Emilia's head against the ground led her to fall momentarily unconscious.

Young Emilia: "I..."

All this, when she needed to do something. All this, when she thought she had figured it out. With the flame of duty kindled in her little chest, her consciousness faded.

—The story will leave the side of the girl, temporarily to return to the scene of the fight. To see two fates, and to see how they will conclude.

Arc 4 Chapter 120 - Great Elixir Forest, Glaciated Evermore

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 14, Chapter 3 “The Day Alpha Orionis Laughed”, Parts 4-5;
Volume 14, Chapter 4 “The Eternal Freezing of the Great Elixir Forest”, Parts 1-4

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by SummaryAnon – [Complete](#), Page 35

—The site had been changed so drastically already that one would forget what it originally looked like.

Traces of destruction as if giant, frenzied serpents had rampaged. All trees have been felled down, some severed from their roots and dancing violently through the air.

Several craters, too deep to sight the bottom, had been gouged open on the fractured earth. The entire region had been devastated to a point of imminent collapse, which would have it transform into a pit to hell.

This destruction was entirely the work of one man, standing in the dead center of the devastation. Blood spilled fresh from his face, his breath faltering as he struggled to keep himself upright. This desecrator had taken inside Deadly Sin unfitting to him, his life whittled away in exchange for power.

He is Juice— Petelgeuse Romanée-Conti.

Juice: “———”

He breath ragged, his face so devoid of color that it had transcended the word “pallid”.

But even so, he had regained his calm compared to beginning of the conflict. It seemed like the raging “something” had, for the moment, accepted the uncomfortable environment as its temporary lodgings.

His bones and flesh had already been ravaged from inside, but control of his body was now entirely entrusted to Juice, the power acting as equivalent for rent having increased in strength and accuracy.

Wielding this Authority, overwhelming destructive power.

Unseen Hand's strength was immense, allowing him to extend his arms to places he could not touch, letting his fingertips contact what he could not contact, sending power crashing into someone he would normally have no hopes of opposing.

Juice's power, being the leader of the Witch Cult's moderate faction, would never match that of the extremists what with their militaristic streak. And that went for double when talking about the person who possessed the greatest ability for combat in the cult, the Archbishop of Greed, Regulus Corneas.

That Juice was managing to somehow face Regulus without instantly being turned into gory paste was unmistakably the achievement of the Witch Factor he subsumed. But Juice's life-threatening frantic resistance—

Juice: "How... about this, DESU..."

Glaring ahead with bloodshot eyes, Juice strangled out his voice as he held his trembling arms aloft.

Unseen Hand's had unleashed an unrelenting, uninterrupted storm of concentrated violence. Having been endlessly battered around by the thing, the enemy vanished beneath the dense plumes of dust.

Regulus: "Oh, you're done?"

When the smoke settled down, it revealed Regulus merely standing there, looking bored with his finger in his ear.

His figure as he stood there, rigorously probing his ear, was completely detached from the environment surrounding him. Absolutely none of the assault had affected him. As if he had been pasted onto the scene of the annihilation in post-production.

Juice: "Even with... all of this!"

Regulus: "How about toning it down and taking a moment to realize? To realize the discrepancy. To realize that between you and me there is a clear discrepancy in power. And you can disregard the matter of how good your compatibility against me may hypothetically be, because that is beside the issue here.

There's nobody out there who can defeat me or wound me. You can go ahead and absorb a Witch Factor, and then go ahead and bring the Dragon and Sword Saint along with you, it's still not going to work."

Juice: "...Perhaps you may, say so... Although it rather appears that I have... purchased from you, considerate time... Desu..."

Regulus: "Because there is no need for me to get into a panic to overtake you. Can't you see it? I'm just here as a chaperone. Do you think I'd go out of my way to come to this kind of place if I wasn't? Being in my mansion surrounded by my wives is enough to satisfy the minuscule fraction of peace I desire. But, well, I have to say I'm starting to get bored."

Regulus slowly stepped forward in response to Juice's words. He walked calmly through the transmogrified forest, descending from his position until his eye level matched that of Juice, and swished his arm casually.

It was like he was swatting an insect. Juice braced for anything to happen. Calling within himself, he sacrificed his flesh and blood to the dark, squirming thing to gain power. He took in a breath, ready to use the rush welling up inside him to batter Regulus around—

—When both of Juice's arms went flying through the air, having been severed at the shoulders.

Juice: "Wha—!?"

Regulus: "What a dull reaction. With how you've been annoying me, don't you think it's simple courtesy to at least writhe in a form of agony that's fun to watch? Though I suppose there was no point expecting anything."

Juice: "Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhh!!"

His arms splaying blood about the surroundings as they tumbled across the ground, the eyes of the disarmed Juice shot open wide as he shrieked.

The cut at his shoulders was sloppy, leaving an ugly wound as if a beast's fangs had mangled his arms off. His right arm was gone from the shoulder down, his left arm severed about halfway down his humerus.

Juice convulsed violently due to the gruesome pain. Bloody froth spilled from his mouth, the excess of pain leading him to grit his teeth so hard that he broke tooth after tooth after tooth. His legs, already lacking in strength at the best of times, faltered and dropped him down to his knees. His forehead hit the ground, despair creeping over Juice's expression.

Regulus: "In the end, your resolve or your determination or your whatever and so on and all those other things I suppose we're going to talk about, here you see what they amount to. And it's the same for everyone, so don't bother worrying about it. There's nobody out there who can live while carrying more than their arms' capacity. Live while satisfied in your own little world, fulfilled, focused only on your own concerns, according to what fits your character best. And you don't even have arms to hold anything now... The conclusion here is obvious, don't you think?"

Juice: "Aaah! Aaaaaaaahhh..."

Regulus: "And being entirely honest, it's not like I'm enjoying this. You might see me tormenting you like this and perhaps think that I'm some kind of sadist who feels pleasure when inflicting pain on others, but actually that would be an incredible misapprehension, and a great insult to the personality I possess. I'm not doing this because I want to do it. There's nothing in my life that I do because I want to do it anymore. Fulfilled as I am, regardless of whether the nuance is a good one or a bad one, my preference is to reject the influence of anyone else. I am without want. I am fully fulfilled. You don't have any right in the slightest to resent me. I was simply walking along, and you were simply in my path."

The spouts of blood became slower, Juice's screams transforming from something loud into something quiet. With the quiet, ragged puffs of his breathing, Juice's form spasmed like an insect as he expelled bloody foam, seconds away from demise.

Regulus's words carried no malice, or hostility, or anything at all. Because as far as he cared he was stating the absolute truth, and no reason existed to pair it with any emotion of any form. Regulus had no need to hide anything, and so truly believed this.

Regulus Corneas was influenced so little by Juice's desperate deeds that his bangs did not even sway in the resultant breeze.

Regulus: "Speaking in full sincerity, this was all very anticlimactic. I was called along which had me thinking that something would happen, and... Well, not that there's ever been a situation which hasn't

resulted in an anticlimax for me, but if I'm being summoned the best you could do is to show me something that can hope to counterbalance the effort I put into walking around."

Pandora: "I give my apology, Archbishop Regulus. I have put you through the pains to accompany me, and the trip has failed to meet to your expectations."

Pandora, who had only been watching the battle until then, addressed Regulus as he looked down at the nigh-withered Juice. She had also kept through the entirety of Juice's onslaught with Unseen Hand while standing stock still in the very same spot where she had first appeared.

Much like Regulus, her outfit had not changed an inch. Not a speck of dirt polluted the white cloth enshrouding her small, thin frame, the purity of the garment preserved, and her beautiful face suffered not a single wound.

Regulus: "I do not mean to say that you are at fault, Pandora-sama. I'm just saying that all these forest people and the idiots in the moderates are unanimously pathetic. Trash without even the slightest intention to improve themselves. They're not like me, sitting at heights where the very concept of improvement carries no necessity, they have these attitudes while being mundane rabble whose lives are over if they ever stop struggling. They're rejecting the idea of meeting their own capacity¹⁷², and from my perspective as Greed, I have to say that level of desire is inconceivably shallow."

Pandora: "It is not the case that every person in existence is able to consider matters in the same manner you do or reach the same domains you have. You are more special than anybody else, and satisfied in that self of yours. You are perfect and glorious. While they are imperfect and also glorious."

Regulus: "I'm not the most favorable when it comes to debates. I have no compunctions against receiving your praise, but I cannot say that I'm seeking commendation either. Though, there was no need to bring myself and the Black Serpent alongside, was there? You could easily dominate this forest on your own, Pandora-sama."

¹⁷² The expression used is "器を満たす", which means literally "fulfill/filling one's vessel". This word choice is extremely interesting, as this is not the only place it is used in relation to the sin of Greed.

Somewhere in that forest, at that moment, the pestilent Witchbeast was lurking. The presence of the repugnant and malicious thing prompted Regulus's disgust, all without him realizing that from anyone else's perspective, he would be worthy to be thought of in the same manner.

Pandora nodded to Regulus's words.

Pandora: "Yes, if we only consider overpowering their resistance, then it would indeed be possible for me to achieve it by myself. However, those are not the terms in consideration. As I assuredly did not come here for the purpose of harming the inhabitants of this forest."

Regulus: "This is what you're saying after bringing the indiscriminate Black Serpent here and leaving it to its devices? I'm sure that you're being entirely genuine about not meaning to cause harm... Then have you rationalized that fatalities are simply unavoidable?"

Pandora: "When pursuing a noble goal, it is essential that some lives be given as sacrifice. But even so, one cannot forget people's zeal to rebel against even that wicked fate. I believe that the beauty of such heart cannot be invalidated."

Regulus: "You're diverging from the point, but essentially you're talking about killing people to achieve your goals. Hahahaha. If that's all we're discussing, then I'd call it preferential to state it plainly and clearly. Compared to making me waste a day of my time racking my brain pointlessly, far more preferential."

Pandora: "I feel very fondly about your approach."

Regulus shrugged at Pandora's enchanting smile. Then he lowered his gaze back to Juice, who would probably die if left alone, and began walking over to deliver the finishing blow.

Regulus: "Well it's not like I think you'll die because that body has died, but pulling your insides out and keeping you pinned down does make our operations easier. Though it's pretty strange to be talking about pinning down someone who doesn't have a body.¹⁷³"

¹⁷³ Translation note from SummaryAnon: "Doesn't have a body, or more accurately, doesn't have a head or neck. I'm 99% sure this fuzzing doesn't matter at all (the 1% is the chance Juice is the mysterious kind of Spirit that has pinkies or something) but hey."

Regulus raised his leg, ready to stomp down and smash Juice's skull to bits. But right before he can make contact, a voice cut into the scene.

???: "Al Huma!!"

Obeying the canto, matter took in the world's Mana to achieve form. Appearing alongside the explosive noise was a ball of ice so giant it encompassed all the visible sky above. Trees were felled and it became easy to observe the firmament, but the only thing to observe was a vast sheet of pale blue ice.

Regulus: "Ahh... I swear, nobody can give it a break."

Regulus looked up to see the continent of ice floating above him, and clicked his tongue. Immediately, the immense ball of ice plunged down from directly above him.

The earthquake, and the unavoidable shockwave, battered Regulus entirely. The explosion of air and rumbling of earth exacerbated even further the collapse of that forest, already only describable as a disaster zone.

The sheet of ice shattered into fragments, with the crushed trees and boulders, the ground pulverized under this incredible mass, changing shape yet again within only one single day.

Shards of white ice danced through the air, scintillating. Among their gleam was a man toppled limply on his side, with a silver-haired woman dragging him.

Woman: "Juice! Juice, keep steady! This is... What am I meant to..."

Juice: "For... tuna, sama... is that, you... Desu...?"

In response to that call, a weak light returned to Juice's nigh-dead eyes, his breaths quiet like an insect's. His life still hanged in the balance, but he still managed to barely remain conscious. Fortuna nodded several times to Juice.

Fortuna: "Yes, yes, it's me. Juice, you're..."

Juice: "I am, fine, desu... This flesh was, due to wither someday... The finger who trusted me, and entrusted it to me, will understand... Of more concern is, Emilia-sama?"

On the very moment the dirt and pebbles that Regulus had thrown hit the ground, out pealed the staccato noise of raindrops beating on a rooftop as countless tiny holes bore through the earth. Each hole was only the size of a grain of sand, but their density and piercing ability presented an issue.

The mystery attack had concluded by only gouging open the earth, but one fragment of the assault had managed to hit a tree which still precariously retained its original shape. That tree, with a trunk so thick that it was questionable whether Fortuna could loop her arms around it, ripped open with countless tiny holes and bursted into smithereens.

It was easy to envision that if someone were to be hit by that, it would conclude with them instantly exploding into a mist of blood. And the most terrifying thing was—

Regulus: “Why the hell are you people dodging! Just take the attack, turn into gore, and go be food for the bugs! That goes for you, Petelgeuse, you pile of scum, and for that woman too. I was thinking you might have been okay to take as my seventy-ninth wife, and then you go and pull this rubbish!”

Regulus bent down, arms to the ground as before.

The most terrifying thing was that a deed of destruction on this level meant nothing more than throwing dirt around for Regulus— and took no greater effort than that. Child’s play.

The enraged and belligerent Regulus had taken a direct hit from Fortuna’s strenuous attack, for nothing to happen to him. Aberrant, was the word to describe it. Regulus Corneas possessed transcendental powers in both attack and defense. And all that incredible power was locked up in a body hosting an egotistical, infantile mind.

A dangerous entity, as if power identical to the Dragon had been given to a petulant child— That was how Fortuna judged this monster.

Regulus: “If you’re not keen to becoming chunks of gore, how about I pluck off your limbs and arrange them as decoration! I’ll make you regret having made a fool of me... of Greed!”

Pandora: “Please wait, Archbishop Regulus.”

Just as Regulus prepared to once again shower Juice and Fortuna in dirt, Pandora beckoned him to stop. His hands still touching the ground, Regulus turned his head to look at Pandora. The rage remained thick

in his expression, and even when facing Pandora, who he had treated respectfully, he showed no signs of discarding his anger.

Regulus: "...What, Pandora-sama? Right now, I am midway through shaking in uttermost rage as my rights are being violated. You have some task for me, when I'm like this? What are you scheming, trying to stop me? Take careful mind of your words, and, answer me right now..."

Pandora: "Please calm your anger, Archbishop Regulus. I do not permit you to kill them here. Is there nothing that you feel in seeing them?"

Regulus: "Seeing me right now, do you think I look like there's nothing I feel...? I go prostrating myself for this, don't get fucking carried away, you woman!"

Seemingly forgetting they status as allies, Regulus gave a swing of his arm with his target being Pandora. Up went the spray of dirt, cutting straight through and decimating the trees in its path to strike her. It connected, her body exploding into a splatter of blood and gore.

Fortuna: "...No way."

Fortuna muttered in astonishment as she witnessed Pandora's evisceration. Someone she had loathed, now killed ruthlessly due to a breakup of internal relations.

Fortuna had utterly believed that Pandora would be in possession of some ace to disregard even Regulus's attacks, but here she was, strewn in scarlet chunks across the ground, fertilizer for the ruined earth.

Regulus: "This is what happens when you prattle bullshit at me. How come nobody can perform any basic goddamn form of consideration? Don't get in my way. Don't obstruct my path. Don't interfere with my actions. Don't rebel against what I do. Am I really asking for anything so difficult? Say, what are your thoughts on this?"

Regulus turned to Juice and Fortuna, a shadowy gleam in his eye.

That was not the time to celebrate that the number of enemies had been reduced by one. Even after the number had diminished from two to one, considering the enemy remaining was a person of absolute strength, the situation did not change at all.

Fortuna had used the greatest power in her disposal to hit Regulus with that surprise attack. And even after the attack had hit him, Regulus's body had not suffered even a single wound and his clothes had not suffered a single wrinkle. It was frustrating to admit, but Fortuna could not defeat Regulus.

Juice had also been so cornered that his body had broken down. Even if Fortuna asked him to do the impossible and fight until he expired, the battle would be one-sided.

All Fortuna was able to do was to have them lure Regulus's fury, and buy time for her daughter to run.

Juice: "Let me, deal with this... Fortuna-sama."

Fortuna: "But Juice, you..."

Juice: "No matter how... much blood I shed, until all of my bodies are deceased, I can... keep going, desu. I... I, shall amass time, for you... to, flee..."

Fortuna: "Don't say these ridiculous things."

Fortuna's cheeks relaxed as Juice attempted to upright himself in her arms. The fact she was able to craft a smile at a time like that puzzled her, and made her rather proud.

Fortuna: "You're telling me to leave you here and run? If I meant to do that, I wouldn't have come back here. I parted with Emilia to come back here, telling me to leave now is impossible."

Juice: "Desu, however... then, if so, why... have, you returned? I... I..."

Fortuna: "To keep you from dying. And if you do die, for me to be at your side."

With Fortuna's amethyst eyes gazing on, Juice's bloody eyes wrenched open. Considerably lighter now that he had lost his arms, Fortuna embraced Juice's body closer, to tell him from breathing range.

Fortuna: "In a world without you, in a forest you no longer visit, what is there for me? I'm weak. I can't survive a long period of time without you there."

Juice: "You are not weak in the..."

Fortuna: "I'm weak. I act strong when I'm around you and Emilia, that's all."

With that, Fortuna helped Juice up. So that he stands, her body close against his as she supported him.

Seeing the couple standing in what could be almost understood as an embrace, Regulus's face turned abjectly disgusted.

Regulus: "Look at how fired up you are after such a protracted period of ignoring my question. What is going on? What can this be? After I showed you how incredible the power gap between us is, after I taught you in such succinct and plain terms, how can you possibly figure that you have the capacity to do anything? What on earth are you people thinking?"

Fortuna: "Windbag of a man. After how our attitudes have shown it, surely you can tell? Thanks for all the lectures, but we've got only one response."

Juice: "Yes... DESU."

Fortuna and Juice shared a glance, and speaking together—

Both: "—Like we care, idiot."

Their voices overlapped, with Fortuna flipping Regulus the bird as a bonus. With that, Fortuna and Juice scrambled up whatever power they had available, Regulus's face flashing crimson in fury.

Regulus: "...! Very well! I'll take the two of you, butcher you into indistinguishable chunks, hurl you into the Black Serpent's dingy maw—"

???: "I told you to wait, Archbishop Regulus."

For the third time came an interruption to Regulus's plans.

Pandora's arm descended from above to press Regulus's head down, his body proceeding to sink into the earth without any resistance. Having been buried chin-deep into the earth in under a second, Regulus glared up at Pandora as she landed beside him.

Regulus: "Again and again and again!"

Pandora: “Should it be necessary that I discourage your will, I shall. As of now, my goals in having brought you here have been largely accomplished. You have done far enough, and I would appreciate you go home.”

Regulus: “You drag someone along, but the second you’re satisfied you demand they leave? Do you think anybody could agree with these ideas of yours? Until I’ve settled this irritation of mine and returned to being my usual self, I will assuredly never——”

Pandora: “I see. Then I will do it. Archbishop Regulus could not possibly be here. He is in his mansion, spending his time with his wives.”

Regulus: “Wai——”

The next instant, just as Regulus began shouting something, he snapped out of view.

It wasn’t that he had been sunken entirely into the dirt. He had truly blinked, vanished out of this scene. In the spot where he had once stood, the hole formed because he had been plunged into the dirt was gone.

All as if affirming Pandora’s statement, that he could not possibly have been there.

Pandora: “Being that the racket has left the scene, we can now discuss at a more leisurely pace.”

Fortuna: “...Can I ask you something first? How come you’re here? I know I just saw you die a minute ago.”

Pandora stood there as if that was entirely normal. That girl, calm smile on her face, was supposed to be just scatters of gore. Fortuna glanced over to where her remains were strewn and gulped.

Not a trace of the gory mess remained in the slightest. Just like how Regulus had disappeared, her corpse had vanished.

Fortuna was utterly lost for words, to which Pandora tilted her head.

Pandora: “Could your eyes have deceived you?”

Fortuna: “———!”

Fortuna was horrified by those words. That should not be possible. But the world had reformed itself into a form that supported Pandora's words. Invalidating what Fortuna had supposedly seen, and overwriting it all with something strange and unknown.

The corpse was gone, Pandora was resurrected. Regulus was gone, the aftermath of his deeds were gone. Immediately after realizing that, Fortuna looked aside and almost screamed at the shocking thing that had happened.

As he stood beside her, Juice's arms— rather, Juice's severed arms, were back to normal.

Pandora: "Since Archbishop Regulus is not here, the consequences of his actions have disappeared. It is all very simple. Although, the mending of Archbishop Petelgeuse's arms is a result of my beneficence."

Pandora plainly explained what had happened to Fortuna and Juice, seeking to sooth the two. Juice rotated his recovered arms in confirmation, Fortuna's eyes wavering as she watched on.

Fortuna: "J—Ju—Juice, your arms..."

Juice: "Desu, they feel to move without issue. My body, also... the insides excepted, without issue."

Pandora: "I have not rewritten so far as to change your ingestion of the factor. I would like to commend this action of yours, and the actions of she who has returned for you. Please consider this an illustration of my sincerity."

Pandora was an emblem of hatred for Fortuna. That had not changed, and the moment she had laid eyes on her, she assuredly could not hold back her rage.

But Fortuna had not imagined that Pandora would be such a mysterious, unfathomable opponent.

She could not come up with any clues as to what happened. She could not comprehend what was going on. Everything that happened on that day, in that forest, transcended Fortuna's imaginings. The one thing she did understand was that, thanks to all those incomprehensible happenings, everything was on the verge of ending.

Juice: "Fortuna-sama, compose yourself!"

A roar cut into Fortuna's stunned mind just as it began to stall. The pain of her slapped cheeks leads her to blink, and find Juice right there, looking at her. He grasps her shoulders.

Juice: "I am sure that you have queries, and I am sure that you are confused. However, you must leave that aside for the present moment, DESU! What is crucial is to safeguard this forest, safeguard Emilia-sama, DESU! And... the defeat of that woman shall achieve such! DESU!"

Fortuna: "—Juice."

In response to his cry, strength returned to Fortuna's eyes. She glared at Pandora.

Yes. He was right. She might be strange and unknown, and the inability to anticipate what would happen next was terrifying. But even so, Pandora had eliminated powerful Regulus from this scene, and returned Juice's missing arms. She had foolishly weakened her own combat forces and rejuvenated the enemy. She might not even have realized that she had cornered herself.

Fortuna: "You're exactly right, Juice. Wondering about what's happening can happen later. Now is when!"

Juice: "We combine our strength, and defeat her, DESU! Should we repel her, the remaining cultists in the forest also will withdraw, DESU— We can save Emilia-sama, DESU!"

The image of her daughter passed through Fortuna's mind. She had been prepared for their previous goodbye to perhaps be their last. And she had indeed been acting until now with that exact resolve. But now, she saw a new hope.

Emilia would be saved. By none other than Fortuna and Juice's power.

Fortuna: "—Frigid white, captor of time, magic palm of sheer ice."

The magic which had struck Regulus still churned within Fortuna, seeking a place where it may detonate. Her canto presented that power with form, with a target, as Mana interacted with the world.

Out sounded a crack as the sharp-tipped icicle formed, the thing large enough that multiple giants would be necessary to lift it in concert, a spear of ice. Its point aimed at Pandora. Should it launch and strike true, she would be mutilated, her remains scattering everywhere and freezing beyond any hope of repair.

Beside Fortuna, Juice hugged his shoulders as pressure surged from him as well.

The power ran frenzied beneath his tattered vestments, all wounds except those on his restored arms reopening. Even in that grievous state, he was going expend the whole of his soul for the sake of those he believed in.

Faced with the manifestation of their powers, Pandora did not even take a fighting stance as she smiled.

Pandora: “Now, please do come— Allow me to savor your resolve to its very limit.”

The couple’s power quaked the world, all in effort to rip apart Pandora’s smile. And—

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Emilia woke up in the basin and shook her head, managing to recall her location as she glanced around the area.

Young Emilia: “Right... I...”

Herself, covered in mud, and unfamiliar scenery. Scraped knees, legs pained from excessive running.

All of it weighed down on Emilia as she regained consciousness, the panic constricting her chest and her rejuvenated memories informing her that it was neither a lie nor a dream.

Young Emilia: “Mother... Juice... Archi...”

Precious people, who had all staked their own lives so that she could escape. As she recalled their faces in sequence, Emilia remembered that she had to do something. Everyone who had tried to protect her told her to run.

That they wanted her to run dead ahead and escape the forest.

But Emilia also thought— There had to be something she could do for everybody.

Young Emilia: “That’s, right... the siel, the siel!”

Seal. The word lingered in her memories from the time before losing consciousness. A stern-faced Fortuna had previously discussed it with Archi. About how the scary people had arrived searching for the seal in the forest.

The forest's seal was located deep in the deepest depths of the forest where Emilia lived, a mysterious door leading to nowhere, just a metallic-looking door standing there in the middle of the woods.

The adults had called the place the seal. Emilia knew its location.

Young Emilia: "Have to go there."

Going there would not present Emilia with anything she was able to do. She did not know how to open the door, and she did not even know what the word "seal" exactly meant. But she knew something extremely important was found there, and knew its location—which was more than enough for Emilia.

Considerations about what she would be able to do were not what spurred her into action. It was the hope that going there would make things change that pushed her forward.

Young Emilia: "The seal should be... But, which way was it?"

Having tearfully parted with Juice, tearfully parted with Fortuna, and ran around the forest in Archi's arms, Emilia ran straight for an unknown place, alone.

This may have been the forest where Emilia lived, but it was no longer the forest that Emilia knew. The region that Emilia frolicked in had been limited only to the village's surroundings. Forget about the seal's location, she could not even put her finger on where her mother or Juice would have been.

Young Emilia: "Ah, hah..."

Emilia wailed at her own powerlessness.

She knew what she needed to do, but lacked the strength to achieve it. She had no mother to cling to when troubled, at this juncture. She had to be the one to act and save her mother.

Young Emilia: "—Hm?"

Her earnest feelings spurred those watching over her into motion. Emilia wiped away her tears, when dim lights passed by her face and made her blink suddenly. She looked up, to find several glowing lights cutting into her vision.

Young Emilia: “The, fairies?”

Emilia called them fairies, Fortuna and Juice called these supernatural entities Spirits.

Supposedly lacking any language or will, the Micro Spirits answered to the young girl’s frantic pleas, dancing in circles before the paralyzed Emilia. They all moved in one direction then back again, there then back again, over and over, demonstrating the course.

Emilia’s voice trembled as she realized what the Spirits were trying to say.

Young Emilia: “You’re telling me, where to go?”

They did not reply. But they did bob up and down, as if in affirmation.

Young Emilia: “If I go that way, I’ll find the siel? I’ll be able to save Mother and everybody?”

The Micro Spirits strobed brightly. Seeing those pale lights, Emilia wiped away her tears as she shook her head. That was not the time nor the place to keep bawling indefinitely. Her mother and Juice and so many people had helped her, and when she started crying, even the fairies came to cheer her up. After all of this, she could not pardon herself to cower at that place endlessly.

Young Emilia: “Mm... mm, mhm.”

The Spirits bobbed about, as if confirming whether Emilia was well. She nodded in reply, and with her small frame swaying, broke into a run. She followed the Spirits’ guidance, dashing desperately over the rugged earth.

She passed over hollows, scaled steep inclines, passed through the gaps between trees.

At many points along the path she came across areas that the Spirits could travel through easily, but Emilia could not. She stumbled, branches scraping at her cheeks, tumbling mouth-first to the ground, spitting out mud before standing back up.

Her breathing labored, tears of fear and pain welling up again.

She sniffed her snot back up, wiped her tears with her muddy sleeves, gave her grazed knees a slap and runs. She withstood the pain and the hurt, running with all her might as the memories passed through her mind.

Memories of her time spent living in the forest, ever since she first gained cognizance.

Fortuna was a stern mother, and had never spoiled Emilia in the least. She was not Emilia's real mother, however. Emilia had proper, real parents, like normal.

Such had been a common thing to hear from Fortuna, repeated over and over, which Emilia both believed and did not believe. She had real parents. That made her happy. But Fortuna was also her real mother. And as far as Emilia cared, that was unquestionable truth. It was because of today's happenings that she had truly understood that.

Emilia remembered being scolded. She remembered nights on which Fortuna would hold a crying, apologetic Emilia, and sleep together with her. She knew that Fortuna would always stroke her head once she woke up until Emilia got out of bed, so that Emilia would not be lonely.

Emilia knew better than anyone that her mother loved her.

Everybody in the village had been kind to her.

There had always been a kind of alienation, feeling like they had been keeping their distance, and were not sure how to interact with her. But even so, they had never said anything that would hurt her, and always treated Fortuna well.

Emilia knew that everybody had done their best to make sure the Princess Room would be a nice place for her to spend her time. They had prepared toys so that she would not feel alone while inside and made lots of hand-stitched dolls for her. The number of dolls multiplied by the day, and Emilia had long ago ran out of enough fingers and toes to even hope to play with them all.

Every one of those dolls, every single stitch of thread, was proof of their care toward Emilia.

Emilia had hated Juice at first.

Because everybody had taken their distance from her and locked her in the Princess Room every time Juice's group was visiting. The adults had been hiding things from her so that they could do something fun. On the first time she escaped the Princess Room and witnessed Juice and Fortuna talking, upon seeing Fortuna smiling at him, Emilia had been jealous of Juice.

She thought she would never forgive him. But he had broken into tears upon meeting her. Cried and cried, spilling tears of happiness, and so Emilia forgave him.

After all, those had been tears of warmth. She thought back on how peaceful she felt whenever Fortuna hugged her, and patted Juice's head. She had stayed by his side as he cried, so that he would not feel alone when the tears stopped.

"He's hopeless", she thought.

"Just hopeless", she thought.

Young Emilia: "I... with everybody, again..."

She wanted to sleep with Fortuna again.

She wanted to invite everybody to the Princess Room.

She wanted to take that cheeky Juice, who was trying to protect Emilia, and definitely stomp on his foot.

She wanted to see everybody again.

Young Emilia: "Because I'm, a good girl..."

The tears blurred her vision as she ran, and after passing by a handful more trees, Emilia discovered the seal she had been seeking, and—

???: "Welcome."

—A girl with platinum hair stood before the door, her arms spread to greet Emilia.

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Girl: “Thank goodness. You were the first to arrive. I was glad to have finally found the seal, but I could not locate the essential key. I am truly relieved to have found you safely.”

Young Emilia: “Why are... you here?”

The girl, Pandora, addressed Emilia with a familiar tone a strange oppressive feeling. Emilia’s throat trembled as she asked her question, and Pandora gave a small clap of her hands.

Pandora: “Huhuhu, you must be surprised. It is all very simple. This seal is very important to me. And so I have always been searching for it. It is one of the reasons for which I have come to the forest today. Which means that I need to be here.”

Pandora’s response was not what Emilia was looking for. She was trying to ask about Pandora’s reason for being there, in that spot. When Emilia had last seen her, Juice had been blocking her and Regulus’s path.

If she was here, then that meant Juice was dead.

Young Emilia: “Why are... you here?”

Perhaps having noticed how close Emilia’s heart was to shattering, Pandora’s eyes widened. She put her hand to her chest as she seemed to reflect on what she had just said.

Pandora: “I apologize. The reply I gave you was strange. I am not the one you are asking about, you are asking about Archbishop Petelgeuse and your Mother.”

Pandora was late to understand it, but she did end up reaching the correct answer. If Pandora had continued being mistaken, Emilia could have ended all this without her question being answered. Even though she herself did not know what she was seeking, with all of this.

In response to Emilia’s inner conflict, Pandora smiled tenderly. It carried no malice or maliciousness, instead abounding in kindness, an honest attempt to dispel Emilia’s anxiety.

Pandora: “Please do not be worried. You are concerned about Archbishop Petelgeuse and your Mother, both of whom are safe.”

Young Emilia: “Huh?”

Pandora: “There is no need to be so anxious, though it would have been best should you have asked so originally. Neither I nor the members of the cult have come here to harm anybody in the forest. It is as I have stated, I have visited as I have business with this seal. So being, I am not so foolish as to create any unnecessary sacrifices.”

Pandora’s words were kind, and one after another they fell into Emilia’s overburdened heart.

If what she was saying was to be trusted, then Fortuna and Juice were safe. Perhaps whatever was happening to everyone in the forest was nothing as bad as she first imagined.

In fact, this girl had just said she had business with the seal. Which meant once she’s done with that business—

Young Emilia: “When you’re done with the siel, will you please go home...?”

Pandora: “...”

Young Emilia: “Wh—when you’re done with the siel, will you please leave the forest and go home? Go home without doing anything bad to everybody?”

Pandora: “—Why, of course. I have no desire for unnecessary sacrifices either.”

Pandora gave a deep nod to Emilia’s appeal, as if she was making a promise. She then pointed at the sealed door, and tilted her head at the teary-eyed Emilia.

Pandora: “Which means that I would like for you to please give me the key. Provided that you open this door, we shall withdraw from the forest immediately.”

Young Emilia: “Key...?”

Pandora: “Yes. A key. Considering the form of a door which this seal has taken, a key is necessary to open it. You would be in possession of that key.”

Young Emilia: “I, don’t know anything about that...”

Emilia shook her head. She truly had no idea what Pandora was alluding to. She did not remember anyone giving her anything like a key, and the seal had been kept secret from Emilia in the first place. There

was no possible way for Emilia to own a key for a seal she had been kept in the dark about. Logic that could go unspoken, a natural conclusion.

And so, Emilia shook her head, being that she did not know. Pandora also shook her head in response.

Pandora: “There is no need for secrecy.”

Young Emilia: “I—I’m not keeping secrets... I really, really don’t know! I don’t have any key! I haven’t been given a key! I can’t open the seal!”

Pandora: “I see— Then, I will have to dig through the forest so that I may find the key.”

Pandora’s expression looked incredibly pained as she lowered her gaze.

While her actions and tone were sympathetic toward Emilia, her ironclad mentality meant that she would most likely do exactly the thing she was saying that she would. That was why Emilia was trembling.

If she did not open the seal right here and right now, this girl would dig through the forest.

Dig through, as simple, vain decoration. Pandora was going to dig through the forest, the people living in it, Fortuna and villagers, and Juice’s group to get this thing.

She was an abnormal entity. So abnormal, that Emilia was convinced that not even Fortuna would be a match for her.

Young Emilia: “I—I’ll open it! I will open it!”

And so, Emilia called out before Pandora could start acting on her words and upon hearing her words, Pandora’s face brightened.

Pandora: “You truly will? Thank goodness. So the key was in your possession after all. I had thought it would be, after all, you cannot deny that you are a Witch’s daughter¹⁷⁴.”

Young Emilia: “A, Witch’s...?”

¹⁷⁴ Translation note by SummaryAnon (same as Volume 13): “This term (魔女の娘) can mean either «Daughter of a/the Witch» or «Young Girl who is a Witch». Though my instinct says it’s 9:1 odds the former, it’s not perfectly clear which one it is supposed to mean.”

Pandora: “Indeed, yes. Now, if you would like to take care of the seal? Provided that I can investigate what is inside this door, we will stand down immediately.”

Handing the scene over to Emilia, Pandora elatedly waited for her to act. While the term mentioned did claw at Emilia’s chest, retreat was not an option and so she stepped forward.

Little Emilia could look up, and look up even further, but still not sight the top of the door. It was like a giant door made by a giant so that a more giant giant could pass through. The idea that tiny Emilia had to open that thing was some kind of empty, hollow fantasy.

Young Emilia: “...”

She stood before the door. Standing was all well and good, but Emilia had no idea how to open it. Back when she had first located the seal, Emilia had gone through all her usual ideas on how to approach the thing. She had already tried pushing it, pulling it, climbing it, far and long ago. Emilia’s tiny form had not made this ancient door move an inch, and she could not even get the thing to creak, much less open.

Today would be no different.

She could reach out and touch it, but it gave not the slightest indication of moving.

Young Emilia: “Haa... haa, haaa... Ahh...”

Her pulse raced abnormally fast, her blood churning sluggishly through her head. Her chest flashed hot, and her thrashing heart could leap out of her mouth at any instant. But her limbs were dead cold, heavy, as if stuffed with lead.

She had to move it. But she could not.

If she did not open that thing, something terrible would happen to everybody. And she knew this, but was still unable to do anything.

Terror and despair bleached her thoughts stark white, crushing Emilia whole.

Pandora: “—Please consider thinking, «I am the key».”

That voice was horrifically smooth as it slipped into desperate Emilia’s ear.

—I am the key.

As ordered, Emilia focused on only that image.

Instantly, Emilia felt a weight in her hands, and so she looked at them. To find that she was grasping a large, ancient, silver key.

Young Emilia: “A key...”

Pandora: “It is visible to you now? If so, then you indeed are the key.”

Pandora happily pointed it out upon hearing Emilia’s mutter. But there was something unnatural about her statement. It almost seemed like Pandora herself could not see the key in Emilia’s hands.

Young Emilia: “You... can’t, see it?”

Pandora: “—No, I cannot. That key will only be given to the hands of those who are qualified. I am certain that, in this world, there are only two people capable of opening that lock.”

Pandora seemed to find that position enviable. And indeed, her gaze was certainly fixed on Emilia, and not on the key in Emilia’s hand. Although unsure what she meant by not being able to see a key which was so perceptible that it had weight, Emilia turned back to the door.

The suddenly-revealed key— but Emilia could not find anything that looked like a keyhole. That door did not even possess a doorknob. And although the key was big, it paled in comparison to the door. Could this grungy old key really open it?

Young Emilia: “—Ah.”

When Emilia instinctively figured out how to use the key.

Searching for a keyhole was unnecessary. The door itself was like a keyhole.

This door was not running the seal. It was merely acting as a lid for the seal. The door was not sealing anything. The seal was something more insubstantial operating inside of this door.

Pandora: “Now, please open it.”

Accepting Pandora's demand, Emilia took a step forward.

Simply pressing the key against the door, twisting it, and willing for the door to open, would be enough to open it. By that alone, this door would be freed from its long, long post.

—If you open this door, everybody will be saved.

Pandora: "...Is there something wrong?"

But the moment before she moved to press the key to the door, Emilia's outstretched arms hitched. Noticing how Emilia's fingers had stopped shaking, Pandora furrowed her brows slightly.

Emilia went without replying, instead staring at the key in her hands. If she proceeded to press the key to the door, the seal would open. But—

???: "*Emilia— Promise.*"

Emilia heard in her mind the whispered words from her mother's goodbye. Their conversation back then had not been about the seal.

Yet Emilia remembered. That she had promised her mom she would keep her promises.

She did not know about this seal. She could never know about this seal. Emilia did not know about this place, and was not meant to interfere with it. She had promised Fortuna. Keeping her promise must be higher priority than anything else. She was betraying her trust, and mustn't do that.

Nobody would forgive Emilia if she were a bad girl. Nobody would be able to forgive her. And so, she must not open this seal.

Young Emilia: "I... I, can't open it..."

Pandora: "—Why is that?"

Young Emilia: "The promise... Because, I promised. I don't have anything to do with the *sie*l. I'm not allowed to open it."

Pandora: “I see. Promises are truly important things. I think it is very splendid and great that you would like to keep your promise. However... they are also things which depend on the occasion.”

Pandora matched her gaze to Emilia’s, who shook her head. In turn, she pats Emilia’s silver hair, who was still holding the key with both her hands.

Pandora: “I suspect that this promise is one between yourself and your Mother. Your Mother is a very wonderful person. She has taught you something venerable and correct. Your will is precious and deserves to be upheld.”

Young Emilia: “A—and, so...”

Pandora: “But, it sometimes happens that sometimes a moment arrives when you must make a decision which will run contrary to a promise. Perhaps it is cruel that I am seeking a decision from you when you are still young. However, fate and its looming decisions will not take into consideration the circumstances of those it trifles. Fate loves those who resist to the turn of its waves, and inspires hope in the outcome of the decision. Which is the hope that you seek?”

Young Emilia: “Which, hope?”

Pandora nodded, smiling like a benevolent mother, and replied “Yes”, to Emilia’s voice. She gently presented her hands to Emilia—

Pandora: “First is the hope that you will keep your promise with your mother, proceed without opening the seal, confront my party, and overcome this tribulation.”

Pandora raised her right hand, as if holding that invisible thing called hope.

Pandora: “And second is the hope that you defy the promise with your mother, open the seal, grant the wishes of my party, and the situation will settle down with no further injuries.”

Young Emilia: “———”

Pandora raised her left hand, again showing Emilia that invisible hope. Faced with these two hands, Emilia went rigid.

She could not even recognize her breathing, with how her lungs felt to have frozen. If she said anything careless, Pandora would instantly withdraw both of her hands. Unable to touch either of the hopes presented to her, perhaps it would end with both being taken away from right under Emilia's nose.

—Terror grasped the young girl's heart firm, not letting go in the least.

Pandora: "Which hope shall you choose? —I leave the decision to you."

The right hope. The left hope.

The hope resultant from breaking the promise. The hope resultant from keeping the promise.

Pandora's sweet and alluring voice. Fortuna's kind and chiding call of her name.

She could not even hear her heartbeat under all the noise. Sound disappeared from the world, leaving Emilia behind in a land without color.

She was thinking. Deliberating. Her thoughts were blazing, her brain was about to starting boiling at any moment. She focused every bodily function she had into thinking, giving the impression that everything from her neck down had died. She could not hear her pulse, her limbs utterly motionless and alienated from her will.

She couldn't choose, she couldn't choose, she couldn't choose she couldn't choose shecouldn'tchooseshecouldn'tchoose. Which choice would save everybody? What should she do that will help everybody?

What could she do that would make her everybody's strength? What should she do? Somebody should tell her.

Young Emilia: "—Ah."

Pandora: "I see. So that is your decision."

Her thoughts soldered, her vision clouded, when Emilia slipped a small sound. Seeing her decision, Pandora's long-lashed eyes lowered their gaze.

—Emilia's fingers were touching Pandora's right hand.

The path to not break the promise, not open the seal, and hope for everyone's rescue.

Young Emilia: "I... promised, my... mother, I'd keep... my, promises, so... mother..."

Pandora: "Until the very end, you trust in your mother's words, your compass. The answer you have reached following your indecision, and the result that your life has divined, shall I respect."

Pandora nodded in agreement as Emilia's eyes overflowed with tears. She released her hand from Emilia's grasp, and Emilia fell to her knees as Pandora looked on, gaze merciful.

If so she wished, she could have just pushed Emilia's hands to the door while she held the key. While that had nothing to do with whether Emilia would will for the door to open or not, being that Emilia had been seeking some kind of support, it may have been enough to send her over the edge.

Pandora knew that, but didn't do it. That alone was something trustworthy about this utterly bizarre girl.

Pandora: "And so—"

Young Emilia: "...Huh?"

Pandora: "—Please respect my decision as I consider methods to open the seal."

Emilia raised her head, stunned.

Pandora was not looking at Emilia, instead her gaze was directed somewhere behind her. Emilia followed her line of sight, to find a silhouette pushing away the shrub as it soared onto the scene.

It was a woman with short, silver hair.

Woman: "PANDORAAA!!"

And covered in blood, it was Fortuna who jumped out and arrived on scene.

Compared to when Emilia had last seen her, she was drowning in injuries. But even so, having been convinced of the possibility they could have never met again, just knowing that she was alive relieved Emilia's heart.

Fortuna: "Take this!!"

Apparently having not noticed Emilia's presence, Fortuna fired off six icicles, striking Pandora without the least of mercy. Emilia's body stiffened at the danger of being struck herself, when Pandora cut in to position Emilia behind her, protecting her.

Pandora: "Launching an attack without first observing the area is very dangerous."

With that, an icicle speared Pandora through the chest. Her thin waist, her right arm, her right foot all proceeded to be impaled with icicles, with one last strike blowing off her platinum head.

Emilia shrieked as she witnessed Pandora's small frame be skewered with ice. Pandora's body staggered, slumping back to land on Emilia. Emilia caught the decapitated body as it gushed with blood.

She screamed. It was all too unreal.

Fortuna: "...Emilia?"

Hearing that scream, Fortuna whispered in dumb shock as she seemed to come back to her senses. Rather than accomplishment in having bested a detested foe, Fortuna's eyes wavered in discord as she registered the fact her daughter was present at this scene.

Fortuna: "Why is Emilia...? She was meant to have escaped the..."

Pandora: "To question why is a rather terrible thing. Your daughter was worried about you, wholeheartedly hoping to help you as she ran to this site. How is it that you, her mother, can proceed without praising her intrinsic purity?"

Fortuna: "———!"

Pandora's voice called out from directly aside the questioning Fortuna. Fortuna's amethyst eyes shot open from both how unexpected it was, and at the fact that Pandora's corpse had vanished from Emilia's arms.

Pandora: "When you look as surprised as you do, you truly do resemble each other. Parent and child indeed."

Fortuna: “———! Emilia and I are not blood relatives! Her adorable face is from my sister-in-law!”

Pandora: “I give my apologies for that.”

Fortuna’s mouth twisted in rage as a sword of ice formed in her raised hand. Her sweeping slash sliced diagonally through Pandora’s torso, spraying fresh blood everywhere. Pandora collapsed back-first, her body limp as it hit the ground.

Pandora: “Which means that her foster parent is her Mother. That being, you have not erred in your methods of raising her. Your daughter has grown to be a very honest, good girl. Her true parents, your sister and brother, would surely be overjoyed.”

Fortuna: “Don’t you dare talk about my brother and sister-in-law!!”

The fallen corpse disappeared as Pandora walked over, as if this is normal, to Fortuna. Fortuna brought down her sword to bisect her like bamboo, capping it off by slicing off her head with the backswing.

She immediately glanced behind her to kill the revived Pandora with a stab. She shoved her backwards, where she slams into a tree’s trunk, pinned.

Fortuna: “El Huma!!”

A blanket of frigid mist shrouded the pinned Pandora, transforming her into an ice sculpture. A humanoid sculpture was born, sealing Pandora, already beautiful enough to be a masterwork of the gods, eternally in the forest as a belonging of nature.

Pandora: “This indiscriminate use of magic is only going to exhaust you. Would you like to take a moment to calm down, and for us to reattempt by waiting for an opportunity to talk?”

Fortuna: “———! Tedious talk!”

The ice sculpture remained, with only Pandora inside having escaped and walking outside. Fortuna spun around to find Pandora standing there, and casually slammed her fist into her. It was not even a magical attack. Just a punch resultant from vain struggle.

It struck Pandora in the face as if drawn straight to it.

Young Emilia: “—Ahh!”

Fortuna: “E—Emilia!?”

Blown away by her mother’s punch, Emilia failed to catch herself and tumbled across the ground. Having unintentionally beaten her daughter, Fortuna’s face paled as she frantically rushed over to the fallen girl’s side.

Fortuna: “No! Emilia, I’m so sorry! I didn’t mean to! That wasn’t what I...”

Pandora: “This is the pain one person feels when hit. A pain equivalent to being hit has surely just run through your heart. Are you beginning to understand how heartless your actions are?”

Her hands holding Pandora, Fortuna’s throat hitched as she shoved the girl away. She stood up and looked around to find Emilia standing beside the seal as ever. No traces of being hit remained upon her white cheek.

Fortuna: “You’ve been saying so much nonsensical junk, over and over!”

Pandora: “But this time it was different. It soothed you. Are you unable to devote some fraction of that emotion toward someone you believe you hate? I am not telling for you to love everyone out there in the same way that you love your daughter. But, there are some who change after receiving only the slightest of care. If I could be part of that count, then I would like to proceed without repeatedly presenting you any tragedies.”

Fortuna: “Who the hell do you think you are to demand kindness from me!? Emilia’s parents...”

Noticing Emilia’s gaze on her, Fortuna quickly shut her mouth.

Emilia stared fixedly at her mother’s tense face. When in presence of her daughter, no matter how detested the enemy was, there were some things which should not be spoken.

Pandora: “Then here is what we shall do. Would you like to try being the one to persuade your daughter? I have confirmed that she possesses the key, but it appears that she will not open the door. Because she is keeping her promise with you.”

Fortuna: “...”

Pandora: “If you rescind your promise, no chains will bind her stubborn heart. I promise that, provided I may undo the seal, we will leave this forest without doing anything further. Indeed, I promise. I will keep my promise. Very nice words.”

Spoken with no hint of jest, those were most likely her sincere thoughts.

But statements and actions which became overwhelmingly sardonic because of their lack of ill will did exist. Fortuna had seen more than enough to judge Pandora’s statements as so. Fortuna looks at Emilia.

Emilia simply clasped her hands and waited for her mother to speak. Her hands looked to be gripping something, likely because she was holding the door’s key.

Emilia had wound up recognizing the key. And if Fortuna uttered a single word to render the promise ineffective, she would likely open the door in full belief that doing so would save the forest.

Fortuna: “—Don’t be stupid.”

Pandora: “Stupid, you say?”

Fortuna: “You’ll stand down? You won’t do anything more? How will you doing that benefit us? With everything you’ve destroyed, everything you’ve ruined, all the things we had to protect that you crushed underfoot, with even our pride broken and distorted... What will be left for us!?”

Pandora: “Things may be born from barren places. Do you not consider that the magnificence of life?”

Fortuna: “When the pillagers are the ones saying that, those words are empty and superficial!”

Fortuna roared, jabbing her finger out at Pandora, who in turn tilted her head, not seeming to understand what Fortuna was saying.

Fortuna: “The struggle is beautiful. There’s nothing more respectable than a will to live— Stop it with this facetious talk. After robbing us of the peace we staked our lives to create, stop your condescending speech. We had comfort and happiness and everything here. You’re the ones who ruined it!”

Pandora: “Our opinions appear to differ.”

Fortuna: “When your positions aren’t the same, the sights you see aren’t the same either. With how you’re always looking down at us from on high, I’m sure you see the sky as being a different height from us!”

Fortuna spat at Pandora’s suggestion. The latter looked horrifically sad, but Fortuna was not going to respond to that. She instead kept up her caution towards Pandora as she dashed over to Emilia, who stood beside the seal.

After confirming that it was definitely her daughter, Fortuna fell to her knees and hugged the small girl.

Fortuna: “Oh, Emilia... Emilia, I’m sorry. Why are you... where’s Archi?”

Young Emilia: “Archi... told me, to run to the white flowers... so, me, I ran...”

Fortuna: “———”

Hearing that, Fortuna deduced the young elf’s demise.

She hugged Emilia to her chest, keeping her from seeing her tears. Just how many had perished in the forest due to the sinister cult’s violence? Indeed, this forest would never return being what it had been before.

Fortuna: “Emilia, Emilia... you did so well to keep your promise. You’re amazing. You’re amazing.”

Young Emilia: “Mother... Mother, I, I...”

Fortuna: “Emilia... you’re my pride. My treasure.”

A clinging daughter, her mother hugging her.

Pandora watched on with her expression intoxicated. Her face almost looked like she was monopolizing the most beautiful sight in the world, all for herself.

Pandora: “I have enjoyed seeing this beautiful familial love. Mutual affection truly is magnificent.”

Fortuna: “That’s disgusting to hear when you’re saying it— The seal’s staying put. I’m not handing her over to you. Get to being an icicle, and wither here.”

Pandora: “From your phrasing, would this not usually be when you advise that the other party leave?”

Fortuna: “All I want right now is to dump the shards of your frozen corpse off the Great Waterfall.”

Voicing curses that Emilia had never heard before, Fortuna once again began honing her magic. Pandora pursed her lips, seemingly pained. And then——

???: “I have finally caught up—— DESU!”

His voice sounding somewhat crazed, a man soared over the trees to arrive at this spot. He leapt over the tall trees, his momentum that of having been thrown, arriving on the scene with his holy vestments slathered in blood. It was Juice.

Fortuna: “Juice!”

Juice: “Fortuna-sama!”

With just one call of the other’s name, the two coordinated perfectly. They stood positioned on either side of Pandora as she occupied the center of the clearing, the two of them commencing with their assault from both ends.

Fortuna’s left hand gripped Emilia’s wavering right hand firm. Emilia looked up at her mother’s face.

——Her expression as her gaze pierced through enemy was so beautiful she could shiver.

Fortuna: “Al Huma!!”

Juice: “Unseen Hand!!”

Fortuna cast magic of the most powerful degree, while Juice called upon all of the Witch Factor’s power at the final moment. The overwhelming powers surged forth, and——

Young Emilia: “——Mother?”

——With Unseen Hand piercing her chest through, Fortuna’s blood rained upon Emilia.

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Strength drained from the hand clutching Emilia's as she witnessed Fortuna's body fall limp.

Juice: "Thiiiiiiiiis is the end— DESU!"

Juice landed violently as he shouted, sweeping his battered arms hard to the side. As if it had been pulled along by that gesture, Fortuna's body danced through space along the exact same trajectory. Her limbs went limp like a doll's, and her body tumbled across the ground as if discarded. Blood shot out from her convulsing form like a geyser, painting the grassland red in an instant.

Juice: "That did, prove effective, DESU... After all of this, assuredly..."

With a ragged sigh, Juice fell to his knees.

Emilia did not notice how Juice still gazed at the fallen Fortuna with caution.

She merely drew closer, gait tottering, to Fortuna as she lied prone on her back. A gaping hole had been opened through Fortuna's back and breast, the damage so great the innards of her ruined body were visible. The force of the bleeding rapidly weakened, leaving Emilia sitting in a puddle of blood.

She hugged her mother's pale head, somehow managing to put it on her lap. Red spots sullied Fortuna's pretty silver hair, and Emilia frantically attempted to clean her by wiping the grime away with her fingers.

But Emilia's fingers were already dirty with blood, so the more she touched, the bloodier Fortuna's hair got.

Juice: "Fortuna-sama! Do not loosen your guard, I ask that you remain vigilant! Once I verify..."

Young Emilia: "Juice?"

Juice: "——"

With a sharp breath, Juice heaved himself up with his palm faced towards Fortuna. Hearing him, Emilia calls his name, raising her head. After a moment of looking distantly at nothing, he blinked.

Juice: "Emilia-sama?"

Pandora: “You have sacrificed even your soul to save the person you love. That is no ordinary matter. The entirety of your long, long time spent supporting the Witch Cult was also for the sake of that love. The entirety of your deeds are the outcome of love. A most excellent, pathway of love.”

Juice: “Love... LOVE... love... love... love... love...!¹⁷⁵”

Pandora: “Exactly. There is no need to fear or regret anything. Everything was inevitable. It was all according to the path of fate. The road had continued its course to lead to this point. EVERYTHING, FOR LOVE.”

Juice: “For, love...”

As he deliriously muttered the words back, Juice’s mind shattered to pieces. Juice’s eyes lost their color. He was in a trance, motionless. He muttered inaudible whisperings, endlessly, a living cadaver. Seeing Juice’s mind so utterly broken, Pandora gave a satisfied sigh.

???: “Emi, lia...”

Just as Juice’s being was shattered into tiny pieces, the flame of yet another life started to dim.

Young Emilia: “Mother.”

Called by a voice so frail it could disappear, Emilia called back in astonishment. Her trembling arms reached out to draw her mother closer, to find that she had grown depressingly light. At some point, the flood of blood had stopped completely.

Which meant that her mother was okay now, right?

Emilia was not immature enough to be able to think this and protect her mind. Fortuna, too weak to even move, was plainly wearing the complexion of a dead man.

Fortuna: “...I’m, sorry, brother¹⁷⁶...”

¹⁷⁵ Written in six different manners, as the original line is 「愛.....アイ.....A I.....あい.....a i.....あい.....ッ！」

¹⁷⁶ She uses “にいさん”, read “nii-san”. Might be relevant in the future dunno.



Illustration from Volume 14, coloring by Xarlasar ([source](#))

Young Emilia: “Mother.”

Fortuna: “I didn’t... follow, a single thing, you... told me...”

Spoken like a child giving an apology, Fortuna voiced her regrets. Blood no longer streamed from her body, though tears poured from her eyes. Emilia felt the hot teardrops landing on her fingers, and scrambled to gather them up.

Because Emilia inevitably felt those composed the entirety of her mother’s current strength to live.

Fortuna: “I know, you’ll... be angry, sister¹⁷⁷... I know you, won’t, forgive me...”

As she listened to Fortuna’s incoherent mutters, Emilia finally realized.

Fortuna’s amethyst eyes had not been reflecting any light for a long time. She had long lost her sight, and her eyes had degraded solely into organs for shedding tears. She was not even looking at Emilia’s face. She had not even noticed that Emilia was right beside her.

Emilia could touch her, could hug her, but it would not reach her.

Emilia, faced with Fortuna as she sobbed like a child seeking forgiveness—

Young Emilia: “—I forgive you, Mother.”

Fortuna: “...”

Young Emilia: “You’re my Mother... You were so good to me... and not even Father, or Mother, could beat you with how you like me sooo much...”

Fortuna: “...”

Young Emilia: “So you, don’t have to apologize. You do not have to. Emilia will always, always love you, Mother Fortuna. Love you. Love you, love you... love you...”

¹⁷⁷ She uses “ねえさん”, read “nee-san”. Might also be relevant in the future dunno.

The dam bursted. Her voice lost its usual tone, as the overflowing tears dripped one-by-one onto Fortuna face. If teardrops were composed by the strength to live, then the final miracle left was the strength conferred by Emilia's tears.

Young Emilia: "...Mother?"

Fortuna: "Lia."

Her hand slowly reached out to touch Emilia's cheek. A hand that should not have been moving stroked Emilia's cheeks, her ears, tickled her hair. As if touching something beloved, so as not to break it, lovingly.

Fortuna: "You big crybaby."

Young Emilia: "..."

Fortuna: "I reeeeeeally love y..."

The strength drained from her. Her arm hit the ground with a thud.

Emilia sensed that Fortuna's body had grown lighter. Her body had lost its strength, and this should be compounding the weight on Emilia's lap, but Fortuna as she laid in Emilia's arms had definitely grown lighter.

The most important part of her mother, which must not be shed, had been shed. Even Emilia could understand that.

Young Emilia: "———"

She had lost Fortuna, her mother.

Juice, Petelgeuse Romanée-Conti, had lost his mind. And Emilia——

Pandora: "Now, have you prepared yourself to choose the hope which follows the opening of the seal?"

Young Emilia: "———"

Asked Pandora after walking over to Emilia, who held Fortuna's corpse close. She looked towards the sitting girl, all while wearing a calm expression and waiting silently for her reply. Finally, Emilia understood.

Young Emilia: "Open, the *siel*?"

Pandora: "Yes. Although highly unfortunate, your Mother, who you shared your promise with, has passed away. There is no need for promises to bind you like fetters for any longer. What do you think?"

Listening to Pandora as she spoke insane logic, as if it was something normal, Emilia comprehended. She now understood what this demon in human shape had been intending by pulling this stunt.

This demon had done what she did so that Emilia would break her promise.

Entirely for the sake of making Emilia lose sight of a promise's significance, Pandora had caused Fortuna's death, tormented Juice's mind, and annihilated the forest.

Pandora: "Right, I forgot."

Young Emilia: "..."

Pandora: "I doubt that these kids will be necessary for you anymore."

Pandora gently reached her hand out towards the unresponsive Emilia's face. Dim lights began glowing, encircling Emilia, before selecting Pandora's arm as their home and perch.

The Micro Spirits.

The fairies who had guided Emilia to the seal, and shown her the way. And, why were they, going to Pandora?

Pandora: "Seeing as I doubted that you would come here on your own, I have enlisted their help. They do not communicate with words, but they have been very reliable."

Pandora smiled as she thanked the Spirits, and with that, they danced through the air. Since when had it started? Emilia couldn't even tell.

Emilia's head wavered as she looked up at the seal's door. It felt like the door was looming, pining to someday be opened, and watching Emilia. She felt the weight of the key in her hands. She had thought that she had dropped it somewhere, but now it was again in her grasp.

Pandora: "You do have the key. Then, you know what to do."

Pandora gave a nod to Emilia, who slowly stood up. She lowered her mother's head from her lap and silently set it atop the grass. She twined her finger through her bangs, arranging her prided mother's beautiful face nicely. And—

Young Emilia: "Just die."

—A blade of frigid wind whistled through the air, slicing Pandora's body to pieces. Her spouting blood froze in an instant, flowers of frozen crimson blooming furiously. With a single icicle standing central in their midst, out scattered the sanguine-flecked petals, a masterpiece of ice and death.

Pandora: "That was rather dangerous. Where on earth is this sudden—"

Young Emilia: "Just die."

Rods of ice speared down to impale Pandora's limbs, a spear of ice shooting up from the ground to pierce Pandora from groin to crown, her frozen body screeching as it shattered into pieces.

Pandora: "Please calm down. I am sure that discussion will lead us to an understanding."

Young Emilia: "Just die."

Balls of ice closed in from both sides, crushing Pandora between them and transforming her into a splatter of blood.

Pandora: "We should stop. You are kind by nature, and not a girl capable of harming others. Has your Mother never told you so?"

Young Emilia: "Just die."

A spinning blade of ice sliced through Pandora from the feet up, casting up a spray of red sorbet.

Pandora: “It would sadden your Mother to see you like this. Neither your real Mother and Father, nor Archbishop Petelgeuse, would desire this.”

Young Emilia: “JUST DIEEE!”

White mist cloaked Pandora’s body, transforming her into a sculpture of ice. The giant icy sword which slammed into her the very next moment smashed rather than sliced her with its force, beating the Pandora sculpture to the earth.

But despite this storm of destruction and bloodlust—

Pandora: “This is something of a predicament. It appears that the effects were the opposite of what I had intended.”

Young Emilia: “Just die, just die, just die, just die!!”

Bawling, swinging her arms, Emilia rained icy destruction upon Pandora. But even as they all connected, and Pandora suffered gruesome deaths, she continuously came back fully restored after only the space of a blink.

Young Emilia: “Haaaah! Haah! Haaaaaaah!”

Gradually, Emilia was approaching her limit for using this excess of magic.

Her repeated casts of magic she was unaccustomed to, red-faced Emilia’s lower body began to freeze. The vast Mana contained inside her young body was running rampant, failing to escape outside in time.

Pandora: “The manifestation of power surpassing your capacities, such that you cannot even avoid damages to your own body, would be because of your bloodline. The blood of a Witch cannot escape that karma— Perhaps this forest had been necessary so that you would not awaken to this power.”

Emilia shook her head in refutation of the noise. Her right leg was entirely frozen, and it was questionable whether she could even stand. She fell to her knees, her eyes brimming with bloodlust as she glared at Pandora.

Seeing that sharp, ominous gleam, Pandora shook her head.

Pandora: “This is unfortunate when I am standing before my long-cherished goal, but I believe that I will withdraw for the day. It does not seem that you will be willing to listen to anything more about kindly opening the door.”

Young Emilia: “Just die, just die just die just die, just die...”

Pandora: “I will regard this day as well enough finished with only the presence of your lineage, and the creation of a new Archbishop of Sin. I will achieve my goal at another time.”

Egocentric logic, disregarding of others and entirely self-centered. Pandora appeared to have washed her hands of the situation, when white flakes flickered through her vision.

Snow.

Emilia’s outrageous magical powers were running amok, warping weather to the extremes and making it snow. At first was merely sprinkling down, but the snow progressively intensified in force and strength, soon coming cloaked with wind ferocious enough to call the whole thing a blizzard.

Pandora: “It appears that, whenever we next speak, I will have to begin by having you expel everything before we may even face each other.”

Pandora looked up at the sky as she walked over towards Emilia, who breathed white puffs. Although she witnessed a hated enemy approaching, Emilia could not move. Her body had already frozen up to her waist, and she wasn’t even able to raise her arms anymore.

Pandora: “You have caused this frenzy of power, and will proceed to fall into a long slumber. Will the Mana of this glaciated forest be fully exhausted, or will an entity possessing power comparable to your own offset it? Whichever it may be, I suspect you will spend more than a short period beneath the ice.”

Young Emilia: “Just die, just die!”

Pandora: “I regret to tell you that I will not die. I suspect that both you and I will remain healthy still by the time that the ice melts and we again meet. And certainly, once that time comes, we cannot have things proceed in the vein that they currently are. And so.”

Pandora's white finger touched against Emilia's cold forehead, who was still showering curses upon the former, her eyes seething with loathing. Pandora smiled without any malice.

Pandora: "All of your memories leading to this day are consummated without my presence in them."

Young Emilia: "—Ah."

Pandora: "Feel free to supplement them however you wish. Indeed. You did your very best to keep your promise. It would make me glad if that fact could be engraved in your heart, and you could proceed being as you presently are."

With her body frozen up to her breastbone, Emilia's face recoiled, her gaze unfocused and puttering. Her eyes spun and drool trailed from her mouth as her mind was ransacked.

It was crumbling. Indiscriminately and unfeelingly, the wallpaper of her memories was replaced.

The conversations she had had faded into the distance, while insults she surely had not received assault her.

Important, unfading— A promise.

She had kept her promise, and that alone was something that she would never forget. And she would never forget to keep her promises, either. She had kept her promise. The promise had been kept.

Nobody possessed any reason to invalidate her for keeping her promise.

Pandora: "What conclusions shall your heart reach, and what smile will you give me when next we meet? I will be eagerly awaiting our wonderful reunion."

The blizzard raged through the forest. Pandora held her long, disheveled hair down as she started walking.

Having remained on his knees in a stupor, Juice was already halfway buried in the snow. Pandora whispered something to him. He stands up, expression powerless. The two of them, Pandora and Juice, walked side-by-side as they left the snowy forest.

Emilia could only watch them go. The freeze had already reached her face, and her awareness remained only in her eyes. Emilia lowered her gaze, and noticed it.

On the ground before her, there was an unnatural lumping of snow.

As if, in the middle of this white snowscape, somebody was hugging her.

Young Emilia: “———”

Her mouth did not move. She could not even close her eyes anymore. Her body was frozen, and her heart was freezing. Emilia’s consciousness——

Young Emilia: “——ther,”

——Then had come to spend a century encased in never-melting ice.

Until a Spirit found her, a Spirit who was searching for her, a Spirit given life in this world entirely for her sake.

——Until that time, Emilia remained frozen in the ice.

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Having witnessed it all, and having faced the sight of her own frozen self, Emilia stood stock still.

She remembered everything that had happened.

Those scenes of the past, slowly unfolding ever since she had woken up. All of them had been peeled of their superficial, false skin, and flowed out.

Young Emilia had seen everything that day. She saw how Fortuna died in her arms, how Juice’s mind broke and went insane, and witnessed the perpetrator of all this evil.

Had she forgotten them because of her own weakness and desire to forget them?

Echidna: “It would be a mistake to fault yourself for the falsification of your memories.”

The girl standing beside Emilia, Echidna, addressed her.

Just as Emilia had experienced her memories vicariously, Echidna had witnessed everything that happened from start to finish.

She glanced at Emilia, who gazed at the snow.

Echidna: "That thing you confronted was the Witch of Vainglory, Pandora. She brandishes superficial and self-serving logic, rewriting events however her whims and pleasures dictate. The dampening of her influence would be a result of time's passage, and your very own strength."

Emilia: "My, strength..."

Echidna: "As you can see, your strength is so immense that you can't fully control it. If we are speaking simply about combat ability, you surpassed Pandora even here, at a young age. But battles aren't so shallow that you can prevail on strength alone. And especially not considering Pandora is a Witch with a penchant for surviving."

It wasn't clear how far her knowledge spanned, but it appeared Echidna knew about Pandora. Although, her expression as she spoke with Emilia was as bitter as ever, and so Emilia doubted that she would get an honest answer if she asked her any questions.

Emilia: "...You're not insulting me like you were before?"

Echidna: "That's the kind of thing about you that I hate. Of course I'm thoughtful enough to be considerate toward someone who just remembered the death of their mother. Even if that someone is a filthy licentious whore."

Emilia: "Thank you."

Echidna sighed at Emilia's gratitude, speaking no further comforts. Noticing that she was coming close to smiling at Echidna's attitude, Emilia realized that she had been attempting to divert her attention from the grisly memory before her in a show of weakness.

These resurrected memories were things which completely shook Emilia's perspective of the world. Things which overturned Emilia's life from its very outset.

After all, Emilia aimed to save everyone in the forest, that fact serving reasoning for devoting herself to the Royal selection.

Emilia: "I wonder if anyone's still alive... in this frozen forest."

Emilia had witnessed both Fortuna and Archi's deaths.

The Black Serpent's attack was information that had been absent in Emilia's memory. She knew the beast's might, and the wicked characteristic it possessed.

The Witchbeast of Blight, the Black Serpent, infected living creates with a hundred diseases just by contact alone. And it placed curses on the land it crawls on, transforming the region into a region of death, where only Witchbeasts could live.

—How many people had survived before the village was buried in snow?

And were those who had survived and were now encased in ice unaffected by the Snake's pestilence?

If not, that was equivalent to Emilia losing her very reason to fight.

Indeed, she could agree with these memories being sealed. Even had Pandora not interfered, perhaps Emilia would have wanted to forget about these events. That was how utterly hopeless these memories were.

Echidna: "...Standing here indefinitely won't end the Trial."

In that still world, Echidna muttered while gazing at the silent world of snow.

Echidna: "The past went along without any issues. Challenger of the Trial as you are, you must have recognized your greatest regret. Now you need to present an answer."

Emilia: "Present an answer for the Trial?"

Echidna: "The First Trial is beaten by demarcating an end to the symbol of your regret. Do you affirm the actions of your past self, or reject them? If you are unable to fully accept this and reject the question, this will all end without the Trial being accomplished."

Emilia sighed deeply. She had thought over and over about what she needed to overcome the Trial.

When she was faced with counterfeit memories, she had questioned herself as to why she was unable to overcome them. Losing Puck, and having to take over the parts of herself she had entrusted to him, was what had let the cap on Emilia's memories come loose for the first time.

Now, Emilia finally stood at the starting point for the Trial.

But even though her legs had reached the starting line, she had lost sight of the starting line in her own heart.

She had left the forest because she had wanted to save everybody, save her mother.

It had turned out that those ideas had been not just idealistic ones, but straight-out fantasies. Her mother was dead, and she did not know if the villagers were safe.

If she lost the reason why she had set out on this path, what was left for Emilia?

Emilia: “—That has already been taught to me.”

Just when it seemed that her heart had begun to waver, a hand reached out from the light and stopped her. A powerful arm, to pull Emilia forward when she was lost as to her destination.

“Don't give up, look forward, raise your head, watch me”— Over and over, again and again, he had said that to her.

He knew Emilia was weak, but roared at her not to stay weak.

When Emilia had shaken her head and insisted everything was over, he had said that nothing was damn over and pulled her back up.

When Emilia had wanted to give up, thinking she was useless, he had baselessly asserted that she was the best.

The pain from their teeth striking each other, and the warmth of their overlaid lips, lighted a flame in Emilia's heart.

Emilia: “Mother loved me.”

Echidna: “———”

Emilia: “I wanted to help Mother Fortuna. I wanted her to hug me again as we slept in the same bed. I wanted to tell her, countless times, that I love her.”

Echidna: “Then do you regret it?”

Echidna’s question without a subject was addressing the moment of Emilia’s decision, when she had been presented with two hopes.

Back then, if Emilia had taken Pandora’s hand and broken the promise, perhaps Pandora’s group would have withdrawn from the forest, and Fortuna and Juice would not have been stolen.

“If”, “had I”, “supposing”. Using those words to look back on the past, perhaps that would indeed have been the case.

Emilia: “I don’t regret anything.”

Echidna: “...”

Emilia: “I don’t regret that I kept my promise, and stood my ground back then. If there’s anything I regret, it’s that I wasn’t strong enough, and couldn’t consider things more wisely. I’ll never regret that I stayed true to my Mother’s teachings and didn’t listen to Pandora, ever.”

After all, had Fortuna not told her? That she had been proud of Emilia, who had determined to keep her promise, and that she was her treasure?

Those very words were a treasure, to remain inside Emilia forever.

Echidna: “Your fight has not lost its meaning?”

Emilia: “No. I... couldn’t save mother. But I still don’t know about everybody else in the village. Everybody might be waiting there, waiting for rescue under the snow. I’m the only one who can save them.”

Echidna: “That land has been polluted by the Black Serpent. Even assuming that there are villagers alive under the frost, I doubt they will survive long while harboring infection.”

Emilia: “That’s all just your imagination. A nasty kind of speculation. Everybody’s waiting for rescue under the snow. I’m going to get them out of there quickly, and they’ll all tell me off. And then laugh, glad to be alive.”

Echidna: “Imbecilic delusion.”

Emilia: “No, it’s a forecast for a happy future!”

Emilia stepped forward, cutting her off. Face-to-face with the Witch, Emilia gestured to the snowscape.

Emilia: “I won’t let you invalidate something that no one’s even seen yet! I’m not going to accept that the things my Mother left for me ended so sadly! I’m going to realize my Mother’s ideals!”

Echidna: “Ideals? Your mother was searching for something?”

Emilia: “My Mother said it. That one day everyone would leave the forest, and be able to live like normal. Just like how Juice’s group and all the villagers could get along, and how Subaru told me he likes me, one day that world in which my Mother and Juice were supposed to walk together will arrive!”

Echidna: “And the frozen villagers will be included in that world? After you trapped them in the ice?”

Emilia: “I feel reeeeeeally sorry about that. I’ll apologize over and over, and over and over until they forgive me! And once they forgive me, I’ll show them the world. Tell them that they don’t have to live in secret anymore. That this is the world that Mother Fortuna was talking about!”

Echidna: “———”

Taking a deep breath, Emilia shouted.

They were no longer in the snow, but in a world of white light.

Heedless to the absence of the prickling chill, and to the departure of the scene composed of her regrets, Emilia raised her voice.

Emilia: “I’ll shout myself hoarse as I sing my dreams, so that my Mother in the sky can hear it!”

Echidna: “———”

Emilia: “I am happy in the world that my Mother loved!”

At that moment, the world audibly fractured.

Seeing the fissures run through the white space, Emilia finally noticed the change in setting. Her eyes widened in surprise, and Echidna put her hands together. In applause.

Echidna: “I see, understood. I didn’t expect that I’d know what would happen, but this exceeds anything I imagined. This pushy, complacent, hubristic, egotistic, hypocritical and forced purchase.”

Emilia: “Exactly. Anything wrong with it?”

Echidna: “No, I don’t really care. But this is one of those points where you’re exactly like your mother.”

Echidna scrunches her pretty brows, when Emilia asks her question. Because it sounds like,

Emilia: “My, mother... you don’t mean Mother Fortuna, you know about my other mother?”

Echidna: “I know her, yes. She’s partly responsible for why I get so emotional when dealing with you. She always did have that «Why is it always you...?» kind of jealousy about her...”¹⁷⁸

Echidna shrugged, her form beginning to fade. At the same time, Emilia felt a vague kind of weight press down on her consciousness, a floating feeling like waking up from a dream surrounding her.

Echidna: “It’s over. No matter how complacent your logic is, a settlement with your past is a settlement with your past. All you have to do is dance clumsily around as you take your mother’s resolve to sacrifice herself and use it as your rationalization.”

¹⁷⁸ SummaryAnon originally translated this sentence as “I Though there is still some kind of irrational resentment to it, as I lament: why does it always only happen with you?”, which gives away the idea that Echidna hates Emilia’s mother. That is not correct, and is a common misconception in the community. The word used in both the Web Novel (and the Light Novel as well) is “やっかみ”, which literally means “envy” or “jealousy”. From this, it is possible that Emilia’s mother was jealous of Echidna, or the other way around; I don’t know enough to be able to tell which option is correct... So, I followed the meaning in the Light Novel’s translation.

Emilia: “You can say anything you want. Me, I’ve gotten used to your insults.”

Hand to her hip, Emilia showed off her composure to Echidna, who didn’t forget to take one last jab. Echidna averted her gaze from Emilia’s attitude.

Echidna: “There’s still two Trials left, but... frustratingly, I doubt they will prove to be much of an obstacle.”

Emilia: “They won’t?”

Echidna: “Constant rationalizations are the nemesis of self-inquisition. These Trials, which intrude on your interior, have terrible compatibility with the present you. You could call it a benefit resulting from your utter neglect to think.”

Emilia: “When you talk in a way that sounds like I’m not thinking, it reeeeeeeally stings, actually.”

Emilia bared her displeasure to Echidna’s lecture.

That said, their conversation here was close to meeting its end. Echidna was practically gone from view, and Emilia’s head was beginning to fog. She could not keep herself conscious any longer.

Echidna: “—I hate you.”

Emilia: “But I don’t really hate you.”

What expression had Echidna shown at that moment? Even though Emilia didn’t see it, she got a feeling that she knew.

Her consciousness, ascends.

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Emilia regained her conscious and groaned, feeling a firm touch on her back.

Right behind her was a wall. It seemed that she had collapsed against it, and fallen unconscious with it supporting her still.

She reached out to touch the wall and checked the writing rudely engraved there. She ran straight into an “I love you”, and winded up smiling at the perfect timing.

Right now, Emilia wanted his words more than anyone else’s to be the ones validating her.

Emilia: “—I’m sorry, Mother.”

Her smile twisted, as her voice slipped, choked, out of her mouth. Her apology echoed through the dark room, as did the noise of her sniffing.

Teardrops streamed one after another, unstoppable. Unendurable.

She had chosen to act strong, to be stubborn, and to not let the Witch see her cry. Inside this tomb, where there were no worries to be had about any onlookers, Emilia pressed her face against the wall and cried magnificently.

Emilia: “Mother... mother...”

The tears overflowed.

Truly, they were from forever ago. Tears that needed to be cried one-hundred years ago.

She had forgotten about it, and so she had never been able to mourn her Mother’s death. In that small chamber, where no one would know about it, Emilia proceeded to mourn exactly that.

So that once she exited, no one would know what her face looked like in tears.

So that she could end it, without the boy who had professed his love to her weak self, seeing her being weak.

She cried, and cried, and cried, and cried.

All while mourning the memories of her mother, her mother’s affection, and everything she had given her.

Emilia remained exactly like that, proceeding to cry with her face pressed to “love”.

Arc 4 Chapter 121 - Help Him

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 14, Chapter 4 “The Eternal Freezing of the Great Eltor Forest”, Part 5; Volume 14, Chapter 5 “The Red Drained from Their Lips”, Parts 1-4; Volume 14, Chapter 6 “Lies to Hope”, Part 1

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by SummaryAnon – [Complete](#), Page 75

She wiped away her tears and tapped her cheeks. She combed her fingers through her hair, which was bordering on a mess, and smoothed out the wrinkles in her clothing.

Did her face look horrendous right now?

Puck would usually have been present to comment about Emilia’s appearance, but he wasn’t. Though, the misshapen crystal that Garfiel have given her did reassure her with its dim light.

Emilia: “...We won’t be seeing each other’s faces for a while.”

The crystal in her hand siphoned her Mana out from her fingertips. Despite being an uncontracted Great Spirit, and its only action being to rest there inside the Anchor, but it still demanded an incredible load of Mana. Had Subaru or Garfiel spent a full day accommodating that Mana drain, they would have been run utterly dry.

But even the forcefulness of this Mana drain paled in comparison to Emilia’s vast stores of Mana. Emilia had regained her memories and remembered she was able to use magic without a Spirit’s help. If she focused her attention on her gate, she could feel the outrageous current of Mana circulating through.

Emilia had been why Puck could manifest in reality. Puck had bragged that it was happening by scraping the ambient Mana, but most likely, a large portion had been drawn from Emilia’s unacknowledged Mana stores.

All that, so that Emilia would not face her forgotten memories.

Emilia: “You really are so overprotective.”

With a slight smile, Emilia rapped her finger against the crystal. Perhaps in protest, or perhaps smiling wryly, the crystal strobed its light in response.

Emilia: “...Okay. Mm, everything’s fine now.”

Her mood had calmed down considerably, too. Thinking about Fortuna or Juice made her heart sting, and should she relax her guard, she would definitely wind up crying again.

But Emilia could not stay cowering forever. She had things she needed to do. And they were surely things that Fortuna and Juice would have expected of her, and desired from her.

She exited the Trial room, and headed through the stone corridor, making for the exit.

Two Trials remained. Overcoming the First Trial wasn’t enough to make the door in the chamber open. Most likely, she would need to complete all the Trials before it did.

The requirements to cause the start of the next Trial were unclear. Exit and enter the tomb again? Potentially a passage of time? Either way, the Trial had not heartlessly started on her during her period spent crying in mourning. So it felt like re-entry was the requirement.

Emilia: “What would I do if Echidna did something mean to me...? I think she was reeeally mad at the end.”

“I hate you”, she had said. “But I don’t really hate you”, had been Emilia’s reply.

Part of that comment had been revenge against Echidna and her constant belittling of Emilia, but considering that this Witch was in command of the Trials, perhaps she could have used a little more self-control.

Emilia: “I wish for you to please not be too mad.”

While praying for Echidna’s good behavior, Emilia headed for the tomb’s exterior. Moonlight spilling in at the end of the hallway informed her of the exit.

She instantly forgot about Echidna for the moment and raised her head cheerily.

That past she had remembered was assuredly nothing trifling. It still did not quite feel real yet, but it had been definitely a huge and unshakable event which composed part of the foundations of the character called Emilia.

But for now, all she wanted to do was to inform those who believed in her that she had beaten the Trial. To see the person who had said, “You can do it”, and to tell them, “I did it”.

Squinting under the dazzling moonlight, Emilia exited the tomb—

???: “I welcome your return, Emilia-sama.”

Being greeted at the square outside by Ram and her curtsey, without a single other person in sight, Emilia tilted her head.

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—Time rewinds slightly, back to when Emilia’s Trial began.

While traversing the route to Roswaal’s recuperation hut, intending to verify his motives, Subaru swallowed his breath and stopped still.

He could tell that Garfiel, walking beside him, also had his eyes open wide in clear shock. For him, the situation truly must be a bolt out of the blue.

Subaru had imagined some circumstances and possibilities beforehand, but even he could not conceal his surprise. While feeling some sympathy for Garfiel, Subaru sighed at the character blocking their path.

Subaru: “I did think you’d be around... But actually seeing you makes me feel kinda defeated.”

???: “Well, that’s not very surprisin’. Goin’ by what Ros-bo said, ya got eyes good enough to see through everythin’, Su-bo.”

Subaru: “He’s anticipating too much. Seriously, how huge are his estimations of me?”

From Roswaal's perspective, being aware of Return by Death— or rather, of redoing, then indeed perhaps it all looked like the work of an omnipotent god. But its power was not that infallible. It provided absolutely no help in reclaiming what precious things had already been lost. That was the sort of unhappy power it was.

Narrowing her eyes, the pink-haired girl, a look-alike for the Ryuzu who they had parted with outside the tomb, one of the Ryuzu Meyer doubles— smiled slyly.

Subaru had anticipated her existence and so his reaction only amounted to him slumping his shoulders, but Garfiel's reaction was dramatic. His eyes were peeled wide as he glared at the face of his grandmother.

Garfiel: "The hell... Why the hell there's another granny here? There ain't more than one talkin' granny, 'n the rest of the fellas who got granny's face are under my orders to..."

Ryuzu: "Everything has its exceptions. Right... If we say that the Ryuzu Gar-bo knows as the representative of Sanctuary is the place's caretaker, then I'd be the overseer of Sanctuary's faculties. A will inherited from Ryuzu Meyer, continuously protecting the place."

Subaru: "Then speaking in terms of the system, you're against Sanctuary's freedom. I thought it was weird that none of the Ryuzus were against liberation and were goading Garfiel. So the one who secretly took that role was you— Ryuzu Omega."

Subaru named Ryuzu, who had an unreadable emotion on her face, Omega. However, it wasn't Ryuzu who reacted to the name, but Garfiel. He glanced back at Subaru, looking confused, "Oh-me-gah?"

Garfiel: "Hell's that, C'ptain. That name."

Subaru: "Considering there's several of them, it's hard to keep track of the Ryuzu-sans if you don't differentiate them. So just for convenience, we're calling the Ryuzu-sans we know Alpha, Beta, Sigma, and Theta. But now there's obviously a fifth Ryuzu-san, Omega. Not thrilled with it?"

Garfiel: "No, I just mean that name's way too cool for the granny... That ain't fair."

Subaru: "Don't be like that. When there's more of you, I'll give you guys cool names too."

Garfiel: "But there ain't gonna be more of me..."

It seemed like Subaru's naming sense had appealed rather intensely to Garfiel. The two recognized this unexpected point they had in common as Omega sighed.

Omega: "I don't mind whatever ya gonna call me, but yer leavin' me behind to have a happy chat. Since when have you two been such good friends?"

Subaru: "Men who trade fists with the evening sun as their backdrop always become pals. Even if comes after getting decked following a four-versus-one. Right, Garfiel?"

Garfiel: "Well ya sure got over whatever goddamn guilt ya had, Captain."

It seemed like Garfiel was still unable to really agree with losing due to force of numbers, but coming from him, the jab was pretty poor. That aside, the act of joking around to buy time and think had just ended.

When Subaru turned to face Omega, she was stroking her long hair.

Omega: "The look in yer eyes has changed. Not a kid to drop yer guard around."

Subaru: "This whole kid thing feels pretty fresh, not bad. Omega-san, do I have this right? You're not like the other Ryuzu-sans, so you don't have a rotation? I really don't want to have Gamma, Ampersand, Dollar, and Pound show up too."

Subaru went off listing whatever signs he can think of, to which Garfiel's eyes sparkled. While Subaru consciously ignored the admiring gaze of a fourteen-year-old, Omega rapped her flat chest.

Omega: "Don't worry. I'm the only one holdin' the role of overseer. Without a spec of a doubt, I'm the last remaining Ryuzu in Sanctuary with any sense of will."

Subaru: "Not gonna go back on that comment? Going off who I know, up to 20,000 people with the same face will show up."

Omega: "Now that has to be goin' too far. Sanctuary wouldn't be able to hold us all."

Subaru relaxed, his worst fears undermined. He furrowed his brows at the calm Omega.

Subaru: "I mean it's nice that you're just telling us who you are, but... what happened? With how you've been treated like a hidden ace up until now, I was thinking entirely that you'd be in the shadows. So why're you suddenly showing up now?"

It was a graceful attitude, sure, but there was no reason for that gracefulness. In response to Subaru's question, Omega smiled weakly and began, "It ain't nothing tricky".

Omega: "The peace between ya and Gar-bo meant ya figured out I exist. Ya might not have actually got yer grips on me, but the second ya think «Maybe she exists», I lose. I showed up figurin' I'd behave nicely to face my judgement."

Subaru: "Saying «face my judgement» is really overstating it... But there must be more to it than that, yeah?"

If Omega had seriously wanted to achieve her goals, she surely could have played more of a hand. Even if Subaru's group suspected her existence, until they actually managed to find her, she remained the superior party.

Subaru: "Call it guerilla warfare or whatever, if you ever felt like being an obstacle, you should've been to get in the way. And your role is being the Joker to pull that off. Roswaal's been keeping quiet about your existence this whole time, and..."

Omega: "Ros-bo's state is part of why I'm showin' up so nicely."

Subaru: "Roswaal's, state?"

Subaru's eyes widened, to which Omega shook her head. There was something sardonic and cavalier about that attitude.

Omega: "Ya take a look at Ros-bo as he holes up in his room right now, and you'll figure out right away why I'm thinkin' of just givin' up. And especially when I was helpin' him as Sanctuary's caretaker, with the idea he'd steer the place into its correct form. Not gonna happen with that."

Being that Subaru knew the other Ryuzus, he found Omega's dejected remark to be rather harsh. Perhaps Garfiel interpreted her comment as being too strict too, for he did not interject about her unsparing opinion of Roswaal.

Omega had been tasked with being Sanctuary's manager and caretaker. It was unclear when she had first obtained that role, but the likely outcome would be that she had been active for much longer than Alpha and the others. There was a possibility her current attitude was built up over all that time. Regardless—

Subaru: "Never mind whatever you've been doing until now, is it safe for us to think that you're not gonna get in our way anymore?"

Omega: "Well, if ya follow my views on the correct steerin', then I still got lotsa things I'd like to interfere with. Sanctuary's liberation ain't what Ryuzu Meyer wished for but, times are times. If the era means that Sanctuary has stopped bein' necessary, then my role ain't needed either. What's kept me goin' 'til now was essentially the thought of not wantin' to be left behind."

Omega's voice was somewhat sad, anxiety peeking through about her role's end. The post she had served for so long was reaching its conclusion.

Subaru did not know what exactly Omega felt as she reminisced on her life. While a good portion would be a sense of will and volition, a sense of liberation would perhaps be smattered there too.

Garfiel: "Stubborn, ain't ya. It's a good thing to be, granny."

It was Garfiel, who was listening silently, that first spoke up after Omega's silence. Omega looked up at Garfiel's words. as he crossed his arms and clicked his fangs.

Garfiel: "It's same for me. I was stubborn like ya were, granny Omega. 'N my thing was even worse than yers. But the Captain used his strength, used his numbers, 'n smashed the whole damn thing apart. Was honestly thinkin' it was a load of bull... but now I just feel damn refreshed."

Omega: "Gar-bo..."

Garfiel: "It's what the Captain said. Sanctuary losin' its barrier doesn' mean that the world we live in's gonna be gone. Sanctuary disappears, 'n the whole of the outside world becomes a Sanctuary. 'N there, both you 'n my amazin' self have things we can do."

In response to Garfiel's words, Omega looked down, in thought. Her expression lost its anxiety and her brows lost their crinkles. Instead she looked to be scrutinizing Garfiel's words, the blond boy nodding in satisfaction.

Subaru, witnessing the exchanged between the two, tapped Garfiel's shoulder.

Subaru: "Garfiel, do you have a fever or something? You are saying some super smart, super embarrassing stuff right now."

Garfiel: "Captain. Do ya think I got the brains to come up with this? Eighty-percent of what I just said's comin' second hand from you."

Subaru: "Seriously? I said that? Nononono, hold on, oh crap, belated mortification."

Garfiel sighed in astonishment as Subaru squatted down to the ground, ears red. He then again faced Omega, still in thought, and extended his arm out, gesturing an open path.

Garfiel: "I get what yer sayin', granny Omega. 'N ya basically answered what I was gonna ask. Now's just the question 'bout that nefarious plot, 'n showin' up in person to see the asshole who came up with it."

Omega: "Anything ya want... What shall I do?"

Muttered Omega. Subaru hummed his agreement.

Omega had been keeping her existence a secret. Not even Alpha and the other Ryuzus had noticed her or what she was doing. Now that her role had ended, Omega could appear in public for the very first time.

Subaru: "If you go to the tomb, Ram and Alpha-san... No, right now it's Theta-san. They're waiting there. They've probably already figured out what's going on, so just go and talk with them."

Garfiel: "They figured out what's goin' on, serious? My amazin' self didn't figure a single thing of this."

Subaru: "That's because your blood flow's running a whole lap behind."

It was actually more baffling that he hadn't grasped even an idea of it, after that past conversation. All those times where Garfiel's instinctive actions impeded Subaru's activities in Sanctuary floated through his mind.

Either way, Omega's anxiety was probably needless. Theta knew that there were many duplicates of herself, and Ram probably knew about the duplicates too. They would accept her.

So the next problem on the chopping block was—

Subaru: “The mastermind of the nefarious plot, a face-to-face conversation with the boss clown.”

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Once he entered the room, Subaru had to wonder if he had even been here before.

Roswaal had been in this room ever since Subaru first came to Sanctuary. This was the room he had visited every time he had wanted to talk with Roswaal. He could even remember where all its ornamentations are arranged, and yet.

Roswaal: “Weeeeeeeeell, if it iiiiiiiiiiiisn’t Subaru-kun. How nice of you to come. Even though you must be veeeeeeeeeeery busy.”

Subaru stood wordlessly with his hand still touching the opened door as Roswaal glanced back at him, and speaks in that aloof tone. He gave a joking kind of shrug, which prompted Subaru’s heart, for an instant, to wish it would think nothing was irregular. But Subaru suppressed that thought and instead faced Roswaal.

The room was an absolute mess.

The bookcase had been overturned, and the ripped white bedsheets had been dumped upon it. The bed was broken in two, wood chips everywhere. The warlock stood in the middle of this destruction with his hands dripping blood.

Seeing those splinter-wounds on his hands, Subaru noticed it. He had just smacked the bed apart by force.

Garfiel: “Captain...”

Having also seen the ruinous condition the room was in, Garfiel took a half-step forward, placing himself in a position to protect Subaru. It seemed Subaru had not been the only one whose caution grew at Roswaal’s abnormal state.

Garfiel's golden eyes were clearly wary. He stooped his body forward, so that he could immediately suppress Roswaal should he do anything shady.

Roswaal: "Hooooooooow domesticated you've beeeeeeeecome, Garfiel."

Recognizing Garfiel's actions, Roswaal mockingly spoke, his lips twisting in malevolent crimson. Keeping that smile, he closed one eye to view Garfiel only with the yellow.

Roswaal: "It's shocking how quickly you changed your tune. You're protecting Subaru-kun, which means that you've been added to his merry band of friends. Aaaaaaand that you took your will of wills, the love you have held so long for your mother, and discarded it."

Subaru: "Roswaal, you're wrong. Garfiel isn't allying with us because he had some change in his feelings. He's just shifted his ideas a little, and..."

Roswaal: "Thaaaaaaat is what I'm saying is superficial. You are ganged up on, beaten up and lectured, and that's all it takes to change your stance. Your feelings are so weak that losing a fight is enough to change them. Easily altered, shoddy."

Subaru: "Roswaal!"

It was Subaru and not Garfiel who got enraged with Roswaal's screeds of heartless words. After finishing the intense fight with Garfiel, Subaru had come to understand a fragment of his feelings, a fragment of his mental pain. And had also come to understand that they had been assuredly nothing frivolous or cheap.

Roswaal could not be forgiven for trampling all over Garfiel's feelings.

Subaru: "You take that back! You don't have any right to mock Garfiel's feelings!"

Roswaal: "Call pliant what is pliant. Call brittle what is brittle. Is there any reason to be criticized foooooooooo stating facts? Your overreaction actually reinforces my statements' legitimacy. A cheap sketch where cheap relationships try to validate cheap feelings. Truly... an offense to the eyes."

Subaru: "-----!"

Subaru moved to approach Roswaal in a rage.

But the one who stopped him in his tracks was in fact Garfiel. The one most wounded by Roswaal's insults, Garfiel. Subaru could only imagine how hurt he must be as he timidly turned to glance at his face. However,

Garfiel: "Yer words ain't gotta lotta punch to 'em, Roswaal."

Said Garfiel, his arms crossed in boredom and head lightly tilted. The attitude shocked Subaru, and same went for Roswaal.

Had this been Garfiel from just a little while ago, he surely would have left himself to rage and snapped at those words. But he, right now, had disregarded them. As if he were bathing in a warm breeze.

Garfiel: "I ain't able to deny that I'm full of half-measures. 'Til this mornin' I was on yer side, 'n now I'm on the Captain's. Yer right when ya say it was a quick change of tune."

Roswaal: "After your treachery toward your beliefs come the rationalizations, I seeeeeeeeee. Goodness me, it appears that the strength you've validated all this time also prooooooooooves to be substandard in reality. Ten years... That is assuredly no short period of time, only for a handful of days to alter your doctrines."

Roswaal shrugged and shook his head. A murky emotion rose in his odd-colored eyes as he glared at Garfiel.

Roswaal: "And that is what I'm calling cheap. If you really loved her, then your feelings would never change their form. Do you believe that your ten years, and Emilia-sama's century, can be handled so cheaply?"

Garfiel: "-----"

Roswaal: "All you did was interact with Subaru-kun for a handful of days. What could possibly happen in this time? Did you create something with him which could rival your feelings toward the one you love? Of course you did not! No matter what you create with those at your side, it will never compare to what you feel for your love! It will not be on the same level! That is what it means to love someone most!"

Roaring, Roswaal kicked a piece of bed which had fallen to the floor. It rebounded and flew toward Subaru and Garfiel, striking neither of them as it instead hit the wall behind them.

Splinters of wood rained to the ground. Roswaal's assertions made Subaru hold his breath.

—Scour away everything except what is most important. That is what loving something meant to Roswaal.

There was nothing precious built outside of the one he focused upon, and he found no necessity to build up anything precious outside of that, either. His feelings toward that one thing would then become ironclad, and if opportunity existed for him to bring them to fruition, he would not hesitate in the least. This was what Roswaal believed love was.

The moment Subaru understood Roswaal's thoughts, Roswaal looked at him as if he had noticed it. His yellow eye churned with the outrageous, ever-consuming zeal of love.

Roswaal: "Do you remember the terms of our bet? The bet that you yourself presented. Once that bet leads you to bind your greatest power and become mundane, what can you do? You can do nothing. Because you... you, are so inferior even mediocrity is unattainable!"

Subaru: "..."

Roswaal: "The potential for you to be a foolproof ace exists solely because you have that power. Once you throw that away and become mundane, and in due time you won't even be capable of floundering at ordinary par! Nobody! After living with one another, is capable of overcoming feelings engraved over time! It doesn't happen!"

Garfiel's decade of obsession with Sanctuary and distortion of his love for his family. Emilia's century, with a past so terrible that she had wished to forget, and guilt that she had left behind. And—

Roswaal: "A decade, a century, and my four centuries! Do you think I can tolerate for even a second that you, nobody else but this mundane you, are the one to overturn that!"

Subaru: "Because feelings never change?"

Roswaal: "That's right!"

Subaru: "Because you've had these feelings for a long, long time?"

Roswaal: "Yes, that's right!"

Roswaal affirms all of Subaru's questions. Nobody could overwrite their feelings. Feelings would never, ever, neither change nor bend.

Finally, Subaru felt that he had grasped it. Finally, he felt that he understood Roswaal.

Roswaal wanted his feelings to be validated. He wanted to validate somebody else's feelings, so that he may believe that was what feelings were.

And so Roswaal had wanted Garfiel to remain weak. He had wanted Garfiel to remain obsessed with his feelings, frantically protecting something that would not change.

Subaru: "Seriously, how come, Roswaal?"

Feelings for one single loved one.

For the sake of validating that, Roswaal was obsessed with how others went about their feelings for someone.

Even though Roswaal should know better than anyone what it was for someone to feel something for someone else.

Subaru: "How come you can only see the weakness of love? If you know that loving someone without end is a strong emotion, how come you only see the weak things about it?"

Roswaal: "—Because that's what I believe."

Replied Roswaal, his voice strangled in response to Subaru's words.

Incredible fury flashed through his eyes, as if he were glaring at the thing he hated most in the world.

Roswaal: "Exactly! Like how you believe in others' strength, and expect things from them! I believe that everybody remains consistently weak! They are weak, frail, minuscule people, incapable of achieving their love for their precious one outside of merely clinging to them, that is what I believe!"

Subaru: "———!"

Roswaal: “I have gone four centuries without ever forgetting about her! The time we’ve spent apart is infinitely longer than the time that I spent with her, and still she is emblazoned in my heart, never to leave it! My heart is still in pieces from that day of our goodbye, nothing about me has changed!!”

Roswaal stepped forth. Garfiel cut in to stop Roswaal from approaching Subaru. But Roswaal put his hand to Garfiel’s chest, looking down at him—

Roswaal: “Wasn’t it easy? When you spent ten years giving heed to the shouts of love inside you, and through that time believed in them obstinately, didn’t you manage to bask in the feeling of loving someone?”

Garfiel: “—! Bastard...”

Roswaal: “It’s fine, entirely fine. It’s what everybody ought to do. There is no person capable of living in solitude! All live with feelings for another. And that is enough... So then why are you attempting to change your feelings. Attempting to betray them. Did you not love her!?”

Garfiel: “Yer got it wrong! I...”

Roswaal: “What changed you!? Your muscled body was defeated in a fight, and you lost? You spent ten years for a malleable love, bent by the shattering of your fangs? Then the one disgracing and desecrating your ten years is in fact you yourself!”

To Roswaal’s fierce words, Garfiel knocked away the hand at his arm. He attempted to use the backswing to thrust Roswaal back, but Roswaal wrenched himself aside, evading. Garfiel’s eyes shot open as Roswaal grabbed his arm and hoisted him into the air.

Garfiel: “Hrah—!”

However, once Garfiel hit the peak of the attack, he put his foot to the ceiling and managed to overpower Roswaal’s momentum, saving himself from slamming back-first into the hard surface. He forced his body to flip around, giving him three points of contact minus his grappled arm. He rewarded this by yanking his grappled arm, pulling Roswaal closer, and ramming him in the chest with a headbutt.

Roswaal: “Guh...”

Garfiel: “Ha! If I hadn’t heard from the Captain that ya can do martial arts too, ya’d would’ve gotten me good.”

Looking down at Roswaal as he fell to his knees, Garfiel gives a roll of his previously-grappled arm, then baring his fangs.

Garfiel: “Hey Roswaal. Yer sayin’ things that an idiot like me ain’t gonna understand. Ya can go on about yer four centuries, but fact is yer a young guy who ain’t even thirty prolly. ‘N I know my amazin’ self’s sittin’ at half of that.”

Garfiel reached out to grab Roswaal’s collar, hoisting the clown close, face twisted in pain. Garfiel scrunched his nose.

Garfiel: “But it ain’t that my amazin’ self’s goin’ with the Captain ‘cause I lost a fight. It’s true that I lost. Ya said it, my amazin’ stubbornness’s been doin’ me good for ten years. My head ain’t mushy enough for a loss to turn that around.”

Roswaal: “Then why are you standing in this room...”

Garfiel: “‘Cause the Captain... actually, it was Ram. She told me to go into the tomb ‘n look at the Trial after I lost. ‘N so, ten years later, I saw what started these ten years of feelin’s.”

Roswaal: “Wha—?! ”

Faces close to each other’s, shock flashed through Roswaal’s expression.

Roswaal: “Impossible... You’re, you’re not capable of facing your past again!”

Garfiel: “Ya can say I’m not capable all ya want. I already went ‘n done it, ‘n saw what I saw. ‘N so, I ended up understandin’.”

Roswaal glared at Garfiel, who was shaking his head. That silent, focused gaze of his was waiting for Garfiel to divulge what he had learned.

But, Garfiel merely opened his mouth wide, and—

Garfiel: “I ain’t gonna tell ya what I figured out. It’s a waste on you.”

Roswaal: "What!?"

Garfiel: "But I will tell ya one thing, why I'm sidin' with the Captain."

Garfiel let Roswaal go, sending him toppling down to a graceless landing on his behind, and looked at Subaru. He sighed slightly as Subaru flinched at his intensity.

Garfiel: "It's 'cause of course ya'd rather team up with the people sayin' yer strong, we need you, than someone makin' ya think yer gonna stay weak forever."

With that incredibly reasonable logic, Garfiel looked away from Roswaal. He passed him by, to stand beside Subaru with his arms crossed.

Subaru glanced over at him. And away. And over. And away. And—

Garfiel: "What."

Subaru: "...No, it's nothing. Counting on you."

Garfiel closed his eyes, looking uncomfortable, when Subaru spoke up and then squatted down in front of Roswaal. With his neck down and head drooped, he made no attempt to look at Subaru.

Subaru: "Roswaal."

Roswaal: "..."

Subaru: "Garfiel saw his past. That might have changed his viewpoint, but that does not mean the feelings he's had for his family for the last ten years have weakened or wavered. The strength of the feeling is staying the same, but he's changed. You don't find that idea a believable one?"

Though he may no longer be obsessed with Sanctuary, Garfiel's feelings had not weakened in the least. He had learned that his unreciprocated love for his mother had actually been mutual, and how great a shock had that given him? Subaru couldn't know.

But who could think that Garfiel was weak, seeing him now? Though he had wavered, and likely would lament.

Subaru: “And it’s the same for you. We’re not telling you to twist these feelings you’ve had all this time for someone. We just want you to change how you demonstrate those feelings. If no sacrifices occur, then of course we’ll help you.”

Roswaal: “...I cannot tolerate that. And so what does it matter if merely Garfiel’s feelings have changed? For our purposes, yet another vital person remains.”

Subaru reached out to Roswaal. But Roswaal did not attempt to take his hand. He shook his head, terrible at surrender, as he spoke about Emilia, who was now in the middle of the Trial.

Subaru: “Emilia’s not going to do what you expect either. She’s going to overcome it.”

Roswaal: “She cannot. She’ll be crushed by her regrets, regret ever hoping that she could change, and come crying and clinging to you... As suits her.”

Subaru: “Like there’s a girl out there whose face’s suited to crying. And actually, have you even seen her cry?”

Subaru recalled Emilia in the tomb, before their argument. She had been carrying heavy responsibility, and grieving the loss of her bond with Puck. Her expression as she glared at Subaru, unable to hold back her tears.

Recalling it lighted a fire in his heart.

An unbearable inferno of rage, burning him whole.

Subaru: “I have never seen a woman so fucking horrendous at crying before!”

Roswaal: “To be wounded, to be disparaged, that is the lot of half-elves like her. Sharing the same birth as the Witch of Envy is a congenital curse. It’s inevitable that would be despised as a Witch.”

Subaru: “Fuck off, what about her’s a Witch? This Witch you’re talking about doesn’t goddamn exist.”

Roswaal faced down. Subaru grabbed his collar and forced him to look up, his eyes pitched in anger as he put them on even eye level.

Reflected in Roswaal's eyes was Subaru, blazing with an unstoppable fury directed at the world. Yes. Right now, Natsuki Subaru was sick of everything in the world.

What about Emilia was a Witch? There wasn't any damn Witch. And if there was one, it would be—

Subaru: "If you're saying she's a Witch! It's because you all made her one! You keep telling her that and of course she's weak, of course she'd be hated, all because of her useless birth, and you are going to make her into a Witch!"

He recalled the Witches' tea party. The scenes flashed through his mind— The old Witches, titled after the Deadly Sins.

Minerva, Sekhmet, Typhon, Daphne, Carmilla, Echidna.

And the one who had seen him off at the moment the dream had shattered, he remembered Satella's face.

Like he could forget her. Her face— looked exactly like Emilia's.

Subaru: "Has anyone told her even once!? That when she's sad, when she's suffering, it's okay for her to cry! That if she can't wipe her tears away, someone at her side will do it for her! Has anyone told her even once that someone would be there for her!?"

No matter what horrible things she would go through, she accepted them as natural. Surely her heart would have been filled with pain, and it would feel like the sadness could crush her. But nobody had allowed her to cry, making her so terrible at crying.

Over repeated experiences in crying and crying and crying and crying, everyone would learn to keep the tears out of their voice, out of their expression, and themselves out of sight.

But she did not know that. She had made it this far without ever knowing that, and so she was terrible at crying.

A world that would do this, a world that had done this— was presently so loathsome to Subaru that he could go mad.

Subaru: “If the obvious thing in this world is for nobody to take her side, then my presence is going to change it! You think four-hundred-year-old curses can’t change, and I’m going to teach you!”

Roswaal: “———”

In front of Roswaal, his eyes shot open, Subaru jabbed the index finger of his right hand to the heavens.

By some bizarre turn, his posture right now, and Emilia’s pose to the insulting Witch, mirrored each other perfectly—

Subaru: “My name is Natsuki Subaru! Knight to the silver half-elf, Emilia!”

Once, Natsuki Subaru had crowed the exact same line without any preparation for it, and many had mocked his foolhardy determination. Thinking back, he had been even more useless back then than he was now. But there was a single difference between now and then.

Even if someone laughed at him for it, Natsuki Subaru would feel no embarrassment.

Subaru: “Emilia’s doing it, Roswaal. This girl you think to so weak is gonna tear right through the last hope you have left.”

Roswaal: “As if, she can...”

Subaru “The weakness you’re clinging to is getting peeled off bit-by-bit, and all that will be left to do is to talk to you... I’m trusting that you’ll finally start to listen.”

Even after hearing all of Subaru’s words of determination, Roswaal’s heart did not yield.

He was exactly right. Something built over four-hundred-years could not be altered with just a single word.

Just like Garfiel’s decade and Emilia’s century had required both words and actions to begin moving, Roswaal’s four centuries would be the same. The actions and the words of Subaru’s group would, finally, affect him.

That was what Subaru wanted to believe.

Roswaal: "...Regardless of what anyone may do, my feelings shall not waver."

Roswaal crawled past Subaru. He reached out his shaking hand to grab a black book beside the broken bed, cradling it to his chest.

A legitimate, future-charting Gospel.

Garfiel and Emilia had both outgrown the weakness that Roswaal believed in.

Omega and Ram had diverted from Roswaal as he attempted to establish his path.

The only hope remaining for Roswaal now was the Gospel.

Once its writ was lost as well, Subaru would be able to speak with Roswaal genuinely for the first time.

Roswaal: "I'll, make it snow..."

Subaru: "Do what you want. I'm crushing all your plans and crushing them unrelentingly."

With that reply to Roswaal's high-delirious whisper, Subaru turned to exit the room. He nodded at Garfiel, who seemed like wanted to say something, and the two left the room together.

At the very end, Garfiel glanced back to Roswaal still inside the room. And, perhaps seeing something in him as he was left behind, whispered in the quietest of voices---

Garfiel: "Ya fuckin' idiot."

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Their conversation with Roswaal over, Subaru exited the building with a sigh. A deep one, wringing all the air out of his lungs, expelling everything in him.

Subaru: "Crap. We were trying to make him stop the attack on the mansion, but it feels like we just cornered him into doing it."

Garfiel: “Started talkin’ some nonsense crap ‘bout makin’ it snow, too. Didn’t look like we were gonna get a real conversation outta him... it ain’t yer fault, Captain.”

Subaru: “No, I totally cornered him when we didn’t need to. Even though I knew the second we went in that Roswaal wasn’t exactly in a normal state of mind, what the heck was I doing?”

Holding his head, Subaru recalled that conversation, which had consisted of the two pushing their points onto each other. Subaru felt like he had finally understood Roswaal’s principles and motives in earnest. And Subaru had clearly given his response and feelings regarding them.

He did think it was necessary to inform Roswaal that Emilia was going to clear the victory conditions, so that he would acknowledge his loss. But—

Subaru: “Doing that meant we lost out on the most important point...”

Garfiel: “I’m tellin’ ya, don’t get down ‘bout it. Ain’t like my amazin’ self got curious listenin’ from aside wonderin’ what ya were gonna do, but what ya said ain’t anythin’ incorrect.”

Subaru: “I mean, that’s the idea...”

Garfiel: “But anyway... That pose was so cool!”

Giving Subaru a smile, Garfiel promptly jabbed his finger to the heavens.

Honestly, the pose had only ever gotten terribly negative reviews ever since he had come to this world, so finding someone who could empathize with it was the peak of happiness. Perhaps it was Garfiel’s way of comforting Subaru. Probably. Hopefully.

???: “—Natsuki-san! Garfiel!”

Somebody called to the two who had been exchanging words. They glanced over, to see Otto running towards them. He had been doing something else, and came to a stop before them.

Otto: “It looks like you’re done speaking with the Margrave. How did everything go?”

Subaru: “Yeah. Got him to pick up the fight we put down.”

Otto: “Was that what we were attempting to do here!?”

What they had actually meant to talk about was actually the final trap Roswaal set in Sanctuary, and try to make him change his mind about it. They had found out about Omega’s presence on the way to Roswaal’s, and Roswaal was too thick-headed to change his mind about anything. So negotiations had failed.

Garfiel: “Hey, bro. Don’t get on the Captain’s case too much. He did this super fiery awesome backtalk. Put me in a good mood hearin’ it.”

Otto: “Do you remember what you went there to do? This truly isn’t a joke.”

Unable to refute Otto’s complaints, Subaru reached the peak of guilty reflection.

But Garfiel gave the dejected Subaru a boisterous slap on the shoulders, and rapped his finger off a dissatisfied Otto’s forehead. He watched as Otto yelped, pitching back, and squatted down to the ground.

Garfiel: “Yer right, that talk didn’t go great. But all that was a back-up plan anyway— I’ll be doin’ somethin’ bout the trouble at Roswaal’s mansion.”

Garfiel guffawed in reply to Otto’s silent criticism. He bared his fangs, and with a loud click,

Garfiel: “Leave everythin’ to my amazin’ self— I am the goddamn strongest.”

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Ram: “And so the three idiots and one clever dragon have departed by carriage for the mansion.”

Done with the story, Ram put her hand to her chest with her expression rather exhausted.

It was a rare thing for Ram to display emotion when around Emilia, and surprised her a little.

Emilia: “I see then. Well, I guess they had to.”

Ram: "...Is that all?"

Emilia: "That's all. I mean, I am still reeeally a little, yes, just a little miffed that they weren't waiting for me."

After all those talks, and they weren't even around to see nor hear how she had performed. What was up with with that?

Emilia: "But it means they don't think I'm going to fail."

If Subaru was indeed more worried about Emilia than anything else, then he would've stayed behind. His absence here meant that somewhere else, there was someone who needed his help more than her.

That's how it was, since Emilia knew that Natsuki Subaru believed in her.

Emilia: "I wonder if he really does love me. What do you think?"

Ram: "Barusu has more feelings for you than he does for anyone else, Emilia-sama."

Emilia: "...Huhuhu, thank you."

Ram affirmed it to Emilia, who was asking for confirmation. Emilia put her hand to her mouth and smiled, for Ram to lower her gaze in thought. Then, after a few seconds of silence, she looked up again.

Ram: "Emilia-sama, I must apologize."

Emilia: "What's wrong?"

Emilia's eyes widened to Ram's sudden act of contrition.

Emilia: "It's reeeeeeally uncommon for you to apologize."

Ram: "I think the same... However, now is the first time that I bow my head to you sincerely."

Ram curtly announced all of her curtseys up until this moment had been mere poses. Emilia smiled wryly, while Ram looked her straight in the eye.

Ram: “I did not believe that you would come to stand. The Trial had broken your spirit, you lost the Great Spirit who was your support, you even learned that Barusu had been keeping secrets from you. I did not think for a second that you would rise to your feet.”

Emilia: “...”

Ram: “However, even with all that has occurred, you have not yielded. When you left your bed, and realized that you had gone to the Tomb. I at least recognized that I had been discrediting you.”

But even so, Emilia had yet to get back on her feet at the juncture Ram was indicating. The only thing was that she had not tried to abandon the Trial. That alone was something she had never considered. Emilia could assert that.

Emilia: “And so you helped Subaru and Otto-kun?”

Ram: “I merely believed that my assistance would lead to a future worth seeing. It would be wrong to perceive it as myself assisting them. The person I had been assisting was you.”

Emilia: “You might be right.”

Subaru’s words had been indispensable for Emilia to get back to her feet.

And Subaru’s defeat of Garfiel had been necessary to prove those words. And defeating Garfiel had required Otto and Ram’s help.

Looking only at the results, you could say that Ram aided Emilia.

Emilia: “Why did you do that for me?”

Ram: “—Because it is essential to demonstrate your own sincerity before making a request.”

Emilia: “———”

With that, Ram knelt before Emilia. Whenever Ram demonstrated politeness around Emilia up to now, however insincere the sentiment may have been, it was always by grasping her skirt and performing a curtsy. Something within the scope of a maid’s duties.

But this time was different. This was the ultimate demonstration of politeness, through which anyone living in this world would illustrate all the respect they could muster.

Ram: "I ask of you, Emilia-sama— Please save my master, Roswaal-sama."

Emilia: "...Save Roswaal?"

Ram: "He is obsessed with delusions. A curse born of delusions, which has kept his heart bound for a long, long time. Perhaps I would have been happy even with that. Even should he never cast his gaze upon me, and never regard me as more than a tool to accomplish that delusion, I would have been happy."

Still kneeling, Ram bared her heart to Emilia. Beneath her expressionless mask, she may have been holding this wish the entire time.

Ram: "However, his delusion is no longer capable of taking form. The world has diverged from the writ of the Gospel, the basis for everything, and Roswaal-sama now clings merely to letters... I request that you may destroy it."

Emilia: "Will Roswaal be okay if that's destroyed?"

Ram: "I doubt so. He will likely be thrown into disarray. He may lose sight of his life's meaning and break down entirely. But you are the only one, Emilia-sama. Who might be able to grant Roswaal-sama's delusion... His feelings, in a world diverged from the Gospel's writ."

Her head bowed down, Ram pleaded to Emilia.

Half of her speech was failing to communicate clearly to Emilia. Roswaal's Gospel probably meant that black book he had shown her. He had also mentioned that the world was diverging from its text. What would Roswaal do in a world different from what the book said? How could Emilia do anything to do something about the hopes of a hopeless Roswaal?

Emilia: "What do I have to do?"

Ram: "—I ask for you to ascend to the throne."

Emilia: "——"

Ram: “For you to be seated upon the throne of Lugunica. Once you achieve this, Roswaal-sama’s feelings will be fulfilled. Please teach Roswaal-sama that the day will come in which his love is realized. Give him reason to live for today, and for tomorrow.”

This is the first time Emilia had ever seen Ram so talkative.

And so.

And so...

This emotion flooding up in Emilia’s heart, indescribable, was...?

These feelings, unstoppable, as someone who had thought her useless requests her aid, were...?

Ram raised her head. The great love filling every inch of her small form glistened wet in her cerise eyes.

Ram: “Please, Emilia-sama— Help him.”

Those quiet words made Emilia’s entire body shiver. It felt like a shock to her bloodstream, enough to imagine that a hand was jolting her heart once, twice.

After the shiver raced through her body, only one thing remained inside Emilia. Blazing hot in her heart, solely a sense of duty.

Emilia: “I honestly don’t know how me becoming Ruler will save Roswaal.”

Ram: “...”

Emilia: “And I don’t think I can truly understand what your feelings are, either.”

Ram: “...”

Emilia: “But....”

Returning Ram’s silent gaze, Emilia drew in a breath. Hesitation was gone from her heart. Anxiety was gone from her mind.

Her soul blazed hotter than ever before.

Emilia: “This is the first time you’ve ever requested anything from me.”

And so—

Emilia: “I’ll do it, Ram. You believe in me, and I want to answer to that.”

In this instant, the things that Emilia ought to do and wanted to do overlapped so perfectly that there was no need to deliberate. She said with a smile,

Emilia: “And that’s definitely something I’ll need to start, right here.”

Arc 4 Chapter 122 - Roaring Reunion

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 14, Chapter 7 “A Howling Reunion”, Parts 1-2

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by SummaryAnon — [Complete](#), Page 95

Holding her breath, the girl crept through the darkness with her footsteps mute.

Petra: “———”

She made her small frame even smaller than usual, paying heed to the rustling of her clothes. Her hand stayed over her mouth, for if she failed to physically obstruct it, she would let slip her wheezy breathing.

She truly wished that her heartbeat’s incessant pounding would shush itself too.

Petra: “———”

The auburn-haired girl, Petra, walked through the finally-familiar mansion, rife with anxiety, as if lost in an unfamiliar world. In this instant, she was truly grateful for the fluffy carpeting over the floors. She found it laborious to walk on normally, but it was thanks to it that she was able to walk without producing any noisy footsteps.

She pledged to herself that, should she get another chance to clean them, she would put all her gratitude and diligence into their washing.

If she did not allocate her attention into unrelated topics like laundry, her barely-moving legs would come to a stop. Even now, she was proceeding at the slow pace of a caterpillar, so what would happen if she stopped completely? Just the thought of it terrified her.

She presently loathed the length of this long, stretching, endless corridor.

Petra had been overjoyed at the time she was accepted to work in this large mansion. Although near to the village, Petra had considered this mansion an extremely faraway place. It hadn't been a problem of distance. More like a problem of social position.

The Margrave, governor and lord of the mansion, would come to Arlam Village during his spare time.

Despite his noble status, he assumed no pretentious airs, and he laughed off and forgave the impolite remarks of children. Petra had never heard the villagers badmouth the Margrave except on the topic of his dress.

And Petra hadn't particularly paid special focus on the Margrave either.

But she had always admired the size of his mansion.

Being from a small village, with two normal parents, Petra would never reach this place. While she had talked about wanting to go to the Capital and making clothes when she grew up, that was merely a dream she had created, one that was appropriate to her standing. She'd known to give up on reaching for things that she would never attain ever since she'd been young.

And then Petra was unexpectedly given a chance to work at the mansion.

To add to that, she would be with someone who had saved her life, towards whom she had some feelings for. Which one fact had delighted her more? Keep it secret, but the latter one won out just slightly.

Regardless, her employment in this mansion had been the start of a dreamlike life for Petra. While the expansive hallways, abundant rooms, and extensive time spent on cleaning did dizzy her, the hectic days brought joy to Petra's life.

This place of aspiration and dreams now chilled her to her core, so terrifying it was for her.

Petra did not know what had happened, or what was going on. What she did know was that she had finished her work as usual, and had just had dinner alone with her senior maid, Frederica.

Petra stood on a stool as she cleaned the dishes, while Frederica collected the meal which had been meant for Beatrice-sama. They had failed to get it to her.

Petra had never seen Beatrice even once. She did sometimes wonder whether she really existed, but seeing that Frederica, Emilia, and Subaru seemed to know her, Petra went along with it without saying anything.

The lord of the mansion had gone somewhere far away. Ignoring the servants Petra and Frederica, two people remained in this mansion. One was the unseen Beatrice, and the other was the girl called Rem. Neither of them would eat meals, which somewhat dissatisfied Petra.

But Petra pitied the sleeping Rem, and she could not forget how carefully Subaru treated the girl. Subaru's expression as he gazed at Rem's face had been incredibly vivid, so emotional and anguished that Petra hesitated to even feel jealous.

And so—

Petra: "...I gotta save Rem-san."

That verdict alone, voiced so unwittingly, spurred Petra's actions.

After Frederica disposed of Beatrice's dinner and Petra cleared away the dishes, Frederica had instructed Petra to double-check the work itinerary for the following day, alongside other things.

Petra truly wanted to help Frederica with the leftover work, but being midway through her physical development still, Petra's body did not withstand the fatigue of late nights. Frederica would acknowledge Petra's enthusiasm and then send her off to bed; that was the usual way of things.

But tonight, while on the way to her room, something irregular had happened.

—All of the lights in the mansion shut off.

Surprised by the sudden darkness, Petra clung to nearby Frederica. Frederica took her tenderly in a hold, and after speaking words upon reassuring words, held her breath.

Petra would never forget how the atmosphere had frozen in that instance.

She had experienced this heavy aura before. The anxiety coursing inside her led her to strengthen her grip on Frederica, who quietly drew her hands away.

Frederica: “Petra. Be a good girl, listen to me— Use the stairway behind us, and exit. Without making any sound, silently, as fast as you can, flee.”

Petra: “B—but what about you?”

Frederica: “I’ll follow soon behind. Once you have exited the mansion, run to the village. After we safely reconvene, we will wait until morning to tidy everything up.”

Frederica looked forward as she spoke her gentle words.

She had then pushed Petra lightly behind her, creating distance between herself and Frederica. The misty air hid the moon back then, providing her with absolutely zero sources of light.

Petra sensed Frederica stepping silently forward.

Simultaneously, Petra obeyed Frederica’s instructions and set out down the corridor, her path opposite to Frederica’s. She managed to reach the stairway, and just when she thought to proceed down, remembered.

Petra: “This is... just like the forest.”

She remembered where she had experienced this heavy, freezing atmosphere before.

This was the aura from two months ago, when she and the other village children had entered the forest. The aura she had felt when she found herself in the middle of a forest full of bloodthirsty Witchbeasts, with her life in peril.

Petra: “—I have to.”

The instant she realized that, Petra’s feet proceeded not downstairs, but up. She remembered Frederica’s instructions. She did feel guilty for violating them.

But she could not leave Rem in a mansion identical to that forest. Because she remembered how Subaru had brought her out of those terrifying woods back then.

Petra: “—Ah.”

After thinking back on those scary memories, Petra sensed she was near her destination.

Make no sound, go unnoticed— By stubbornly adhering to those rules, her sluggish journey reached the end of its path.

Just reaching Rem's room did not make small Petra capable of carrying her and fleeing. Petra had been so overwhelmed by urgency that she had not even considered that fact. She had merely thought that, should she reach Rem's sleeping room and confirm that she was there, everything would work out.

A sense of duty unfitting to her small stature, and the terror of knowing that death was near, both berated her. Nobody could fault Petra for failing to notice the obvious.

Just a few more steps, a few more meters, two rooms away, and there it would be. Almost no distance at all left to reach her destination.

Her heart pounded so loud it could explode, the noise of her breathing slipping out between her fingers.

Just a little further, just a little more, just a—

Petra: "———"

—Reaching the room, Petra looked up.

And that's when it happened. When, outside the hallway window, wind blew aside the clouds that blocked the moon. Its light beamed in through the window, bringing color to a once-dark world. And Petra then saw it.

???: "My, what an adorable maid."

A woman so dark as to meld into the darkness of the shadows stood directly in front of her. Between Petra and the door, just three steps away.

She was a tall woman, with long hair. Her sensual clothes displayed her voluptuous body unreservedly. Her hand flicked the tip of her braid as she calmly approached, all exceptionally erotic.

That was, provided you had failed to notice the large, gleaming knife in her free hand.

Woman: “From what I’m told, I have two targets with one more appended. You’re the little maid, aren’t you?”

Petra: “...Ah.”

Woman: “You’re shivering? Don’t worry— Your guts are bound to be pretty. Girls with futures always have beautiful entrails.”

Petra had no idea what she was saying.

But she did know that her advance was synonymous with the approach of death. Petra knew this, but her feet froze in terror, unable to move.

The slender woman held an unfittingly large knife. Once that thing struck her, Petra’s life will be messily reaped. And yet.

Woman: “Good girl... I’ll send you to meet the angels.”

Heartlessly, the woman raised her knife, the shivering girl as her target. The blade sliced through wind, cutting into Petra’s belly— But before that,

???: “Petra!!”

A large silhouette swooped in from the other end of the corridor, cutting into the space between Petra and the knife, sparks flying alongside shrill metallic noise.

Petra’s protector, their long blonde hair fluttering, was a character very familiar to her. There was only one person with a back so large and dependable that it did not seem that of a woman.

Petra: “Frederica-neesama!”

Frederica: “You naughty girl, Petra. I told you to flee... You are going to get a scolding after this.”

Petra: “Yes, yes!”

Frederica turned only her neck to glance back at Petra, reproaching her in a harsh voice.

Petra trembles at the words naughty girl, nodding several times at Frederica’s back in tears.

Woman: "You're the big maid? Big did indeed mean big."

With the two having their exchange in front of her, the knife-wielding woman retreated a short way and tilted her head. The way her braid swayed with the movement did not match with the woman's strangeness, seeming somewhat comical.

Frederica: "My large size does bother me, you realize. Likely from my father."

Woman: "Then your father was huge. And if you're that huge, that means you have superb guts. I'm excited."

Frederica: "Your hobbies cannot be called tasteful."

Woman: "Women have brighter and more vivid guts than men do. I'll do a comparison with yours, and teach you that."

Frederica jabbed her arms out in front of her as she took a combat stance. Her hands were adorned with clawed cestus, which were likely the weapon which had parried the woman's strike. They made use of Frederica's large, powerful build, so you could call it a weapon suited for her, but...

Frederica: "Frustratingly, this is not going to prove an adequate match."

Woman: "You do look like you have some ability to you, but probably, not as much as me. After an experience in the Capital where I practically died, my skills have gotten better."

Frederica: "I see. I find myself rather wishing to curse whoever failed to terminate you."

Cold sweat rose on Frederica's brow. The overwhelming grisliness radiating from the woman made Frederica feel the disparity in strength with just a glance. She looked like she was merely standing there, doing nothing, and yet a thick aura of death exuded from her.

How many lives had she reaped to radiate this ghastliness?

Frederica: "Petra. This time, truly do leave the mansion. I shall stall her."

Petra: "B—but, nee-sama..."

Petra glanced at the door to the room beside them. With that, Frederica understood why Petra had disobeyed her orders and arrived here. And so,

Frederica: “I would not know who has commissioned you... but it would appear that Petra and I are listed as targets.”

Woman: “Yes, you are. You, the little maid, and the Spirit girl. I’m not exactly satisfied with the numbers, but I’ve never opened a Spirit’s stomach before, so I’m excited for it. I was just a step behind last time and didn’t manage to do it.”

Frederica: “You certainly divulged that information smoothly. Does this not disqualify you as a professional?”

Woman: “I don’t mind it. Your mouth’s going to stop working soon, and if you’re thinking to complain to my employer, then I just have to keep you quiet.”

Frederica: “How deranged.”

This conversation would give anyone a headache.

Frederica sensed that speaking with the woman any further would be pointless. Regardless, she had managed to get the answers that she wished to hear.

Frederica: “Petra. She is targeting yourself, myself, and Beatrice-sama. Do you understand?”

Petra: “—Yes, ma’am.”

Petra nodded as she wiped away her tears. With that last exchange, and this statement, Petra supposed Frederica’s intentions. She was a smart girl. A good student. Someone Frederica did not want to die.

Frederica: “Leave!”

Petra: “Yes ma’am!”

In response to Frederica’s voice, Petra practically tripped over herself as she broke into a run.

Immediately, the black-garbed woman threw something at her. Four knives, slicing through wind as they loomed in on Petra's back. Their superb aim was brilliantly disgusting, and a snap of Frederica's cestus barely managed to deflect them. Shrill metallic noise pealed out as all the thrown knives rebounded, thrown off-course.

Petra did not even look back as she fled. She trusted Frederica entirely. And so, the little girl had to answer to the senior's demands.

Woman: "She's a good girl."

Frederica: "Yes, she's my pride!"

Frederica slammed her left cestus at the woman, who dodged by tilting forward slightly. However, then targeting the stooped woman's stomach, Frederica unleashed a kick.

Frederica's kick drilled through the air, capable of destroying walls. Unlike her normal human mother, Frederica's father was a half-blood from a lineage of fighting creatures. While she did not entirely approve of the blood coursing through her veins, she was thankful for its strength this time.

The kick slammed into the woman, whose eyes shot wide open. She immediately brought her free hand up to block, but the kick would be powerful enough to snap those skinny arms of hers and—

Frederica: "Wha!?"

Woman: "Does this truly surprise you?"

Frederica swallowed her breath. The woman's scarlet lips relaxed into a smile, everything upside down. The moment that her left hand touched Frederica's leg, in a situation which would not forgive even the slightest error in force, the woman pulled off some nigh impossible acrobatics. She leaned her body weight into Frederica's kick and pulled herself into a one-handed handstand. Frederica shivered at the feather-light woman perched on her leg.

Frederica: "Spider!"

Woman: "Someone else called me the exact same thing not too long ago."

Her voice sounded as she had been somewhat stung by those remarks, but no such sentiment was reflected in her ferocious strike.

Moonlight glinted off her blade as it cleaved the air for Frederica's neck. Frederica immediately drew up her cestus to parry it, but both this arm, as well as the other one which was supposed to aid in the deflection, screamed in pain.

Although one-handed, and with arms far skinnier than Frederica's, the woman's grip strength was immense. Sparks flew as the blades shrieked against each other and Frederica lowered the leg the woman was perched on, then aiming for her face and—

Woman: "Poor choice."

The knife remained caught in the cestus's claws— as the woman used it as a pivot point to flip even further overhead.

The trajectory of Frederica's kick was supposed to have caught her as she fell, but instead passed harmlessly beneath her as the woman's free hand reached for her leg. Out from beneath her skirt, there peeked yet another foreboding knife.

Woman: "Show me your vibrant insides."

Still upside down, the woman's two knives fly in from both left and right, force enough to slice Frederica in twain.

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Soaring down the staircase, Petra gave great swings of her little arms as she ran. She heard the shrill peals of metal meeting metal from upstairs, and Frederica's quiet scream.

Petra was not foolish enough to stay fixated on stubborn, childish ideas that would keep her from listening to Frederica, fighting so that she could flee. But even Petra, who knows absolutely nothing about fighting, knew this.

That shadowy woman was a horrifying monster.

Frederica's face had looked so scary, but the woman's smile had not faltered for even a moment. Petra was not unaware of the strength gap. In fact, she was incredibly aware of it.

Leaving Frederica behind like this meant that she would be murdered.

Petra: "But if, Beatrice-sama was here...!"

There was one last person present in this mansion.

It seems like the shadowy woman was unaware of Rem's presence. Naturally, Petra did figure that the woman would add Rem to her list of targets were she to find her, but so long as she and Frederica refrained from announcing Rem's existence, it was unlikely that the woman would notice her.

Petra: "This one... Not it, then this one!?"

Having descended the staircase, Petra opened a random nearby door and checked inside.

It was unbelievable, but apparently Beatrice lived inside a moving room in this mansion. Should you open many of the mansion's doors, eventually one would lead to Beatrice's room. That was how powerful of a magician she was.

Petra required that magician's help right now. If that person was present here, then she would surely help Frederica. She'd do away with that shadowy woman, and protect Petra's dream mansion.

Petra: "Not here... not here either... Nee-sama!"

Out of breath and eyes flowing with tears, Petra was near to collapse. She had opened all the nearby doors in the servant's quarters. But Beatrice had not appeared. How long had it been since Frederica started fighting that woman?

Petra needed to hurry, really needs to hurry, and yet.

Petra: "Nee-sama..."

She needed to run, yet her legs did not move.

Petra clapped her hand against her leg in an attempt to invigorate her withering heart. But that was not enough. She did not have the courage. And her hopes were seconds from dying as well.

Petra: “—Subaru.”

With weakness dominating her heart, the name she called in desperation belonged to someone not present.

It was the name of the one Petra thought was the bravest person in the world. He was amazing and courageous, overpowering his shaking legs as he faced opponents he could possibly defeat.

When Petra and the other villages had been in real danger, and she almost died, he had been their savior— And his name was the one she called upon.

Even though she knew that he was not here.

Petra: “Subaru, Subaru... help me, Subaru...”

???: “Alright, will do, Petra.”

Petra: “Wha—”

Crying, with her face buried in her hands, the voice led Petra to look up. Tears blurred her vision. Somebody was standing right in front of her.

They kneeled to match the cowering Petra’s eye level, and—

???: “My bad for being late. But here I am to help you. Thank god you’re safe, Petra.”

His familiar face with its nasty eyes gave her an awkward smile. His expression as he tried his best to comfort Petra was not tender in the slightest, which brought Petra absolute relief.

Petra: “Are you Subaru? You’re here for us?”

Subaru: “It’s me, and I’m here. Everything’s okay now.”

He nodded reassuringly, and Petra reached out to him. She pat his cheeks, and when she leaned forward too far and fell, he caught her.

It was no hallucination and no dream, he was here. He was here for her. She would love to bask in the relief it brought her— But it was not the time for that.

Petra: “Subaru. Frederica-neesama’s fighting with a lady upstairs.”

Subaru: “Frederica is?”

Petra: “A dark woman, with a big knife and really scary.”

Subaru: “A dark horrifying lady with a huge knife... Yeah, I know her.”

Subaru grimaced at Petra’s words. It seemed like they both understood how threatening she was. Petra tugged Subaru’s arm.

Petra: “Please, save Frederica-neesama! Beat that lady, Subaru!”

Subaru: “Okay, just leave everything to me! That’s what I wanna say, but if I face off against someone who Frederica can’t beat, I’m gonna be a corpse in under a second!”

Petra: “———”

For an instant, Petra’s heart threatened to flood with despair. But Subaru’s palm came down to pat Petra’s head gently.

Subaru: “And so I sent in some crazy strong reinforcements instead.”

Subaru looks up as if staring at the floor above, apparently imagining the scene unfolding there. His expression is somewhere between relaxed and anxious, an undefined thing.

Subaru: “It’s a shame the reunion will be interrupted by a nuisance that’s a bit too much of a nuisance, though.”

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Frederica was seconds away from accepting something as fact— I am going to be sliced in two through the stomach.

???: “Sorry for this... But you ain’t invited.”

Metal clashed against metal alongside a voice which sounded pleasantly displeased. It was a contradiction, but true. They sounded excited, but also sounded disgusted by their opponent. Which was really to be expected.

Woman: “You...”

???: “Yer gonna be sittin’ there downside up for fuckin’ ever, eh!? —Get th’hell off!”

Her blades blocked and attack ineffectual, up slammed a ferocious kick into the woman’s chest. Her body curved into a C as she blasted away, and the man lowered his raised leg, clattering his arms against each other.

Both his arms were equipped with silver, gleaming shields. A one-handed shield for each arm, both covering his fists.

Man: “Accordin’ to the Captain, they say «the best defense is a good offense».”

Sharp fangs bared, the man’s teeth clicked as he spoke.

Man: “So there ya go. Got defensive shields set up to go on offense. Best offense and best defense happenin’ at the same time, so with two bests ain’t it the damn strongest?”

It was dumb, child-tier logic. But this man was applying his child-tier idea, and using two shields as weapons.

The blond man took a stance with his feet positioned far apart, glaring attentively at the opponent as he craned his head back at Frederica.

Man: “Ain’t I right, sis— Fuckin’ hell, yer huge!?”

Instantly, the warrior’s atmosphere about him dissolved. The man’s—no, the boy’s eyes shot open in shock as he gazed Frederica top to bottom.

Boy: “Wha— Yer serious!? That’s my sis!? Ain’t my sis meant to be smaller, skinner, with a softer lookin’ face!? This ain’t my sis, ‘tis more like my big bro... Agaaaaaahh!?”

Frederica: “Do not be rude.”

Frederica jabbed her knee into the rude, staring boy’s side. The boy tumbled to the ground before sluggishly getting back up. Looking at his dizzied face, Frederica noticed it. The scar on his forehead.

Frederica: “Is that you, Garf?”

Garfiel: “Never mind that, am I really safe to be callin’ ya Frederica... Can’t frickin’ believe it... Gah!”

Frederica: “Do not neglect to appropriately refer to me as your elder sister.”

Halfway through standing up again, an elbow to the back sent Garfiel back into agony. Looking at him in pain like this made Frederica remember the time they were young— They had no toys in Sanctuary, and had to use their bodies to stave away boredom.

Frederica had just flung Garfiel away with complete disregard for their nine-year age gap. Exactly the same as back then.

Frederica: “No. Garf... you have truly grown large.”

Garfiel: “It just sounds like sarcasm when yer sayin’ it, oy! ‘N just so you know, my amazin’ self’s still gonna be gettin’ bigger! Don’t think yer gonna be lookin’ down on the top of my head forever!”

Frederica: “Huhuhu, allow me to amend that. Your body may have grown larger, but you remain as small as always.”

Garfiel: “The hell was that!?”

Garfiel bared his teeth as he objected to Frederica’s statement. This interaction with her little brother, happening for the first time in ten years, filled Frederica with an unbelievable happiness.

Who would have thought a day would come where she spoke with Garfiel outside Sanctuary?

—Someone who had ventured to Sanctuary surely had done well. Ram, or Emilia, or Subaru? Which of them was it?

Frederica: “Ah, Otto-sama was also with you.”

Garfiel: “Ha, that guy flat never gets his payoff. Kinda like «A migurd-made bridge collapses on the usual», and guess he’s just that kinda guy.”

The vision of a dejected-looking grey-haired man came to mind. While the siblings both reached that conclusion, from deep in the dark hallway,

???: “Do you mind if I begin to act now?”

Garfiel: “Yer bothered waitin’ fer us, pretty considerate of yer. If yer gonna be so nice, then how about forgettin’ yer work ‘n goin’ damn home. My amazin’ self ain’t lookin’ to punch women around.”

Woman: “Goodness, how kind of you.”

Garfiel gestured as if swatting away a bug, to which the woman smiled. Frederica tapped Garfiel’s back, for he was overwhelmingly careless.

Frederica: “Garf. You are going to have a painful time should you judge her by her womanly appearance.”

Garfiel: “Yeah I got it, she ain’t anythin’ normal. N’ anyway ya better bet the only lady in the world who’s gettin’ my real lady treatment is Ram.”

Frederica: “If you believe that sounded cool, I will tell you that it was not cool in the slightest. Ram would snort at you.”

Garfiel: “The hell!?”

Frederica looked astonished. Garfiel glanced back at her, indignant.

—That instant, a silver disk comes shooting from the woman’s hand.

A disk. Or no, it wasn’t a disk, it was a knife rotating at insane speeds on the vertical. The thing whistled through the air, too fast to see, zooming in on Garfiel, ready to split his head open and splatter fresh blood about the corridor.

Garfiel: “Y’know.”

Woman: “———”

The metal shields clattered together as a searing shower of sparks burst out.

The thrown knife sliced the face of the raised right shield, before a skillful shift in its angle sent the knife flying up to pierce the ceiling. Garfiel did not watch that however, instead racing forward, gliding over the floor on approach to the woman as he raised his other shield.

Garfiel: “I did tell ya to get the hell out of here, yeah?”

Woman: “I heard, and here’s my response.”

Just before his fist connected, the woman flitted backward, yanking in her arm. Immediately, the knife behind Garfiel was ripped out of the ceiling, rotating again with its momentum as it attacked him from behind. A string had been tied around the knife’s handle, connected to the woman’s other knife.

Frederica: “Garf!”

She was too slow to warn him.

The blade rotated as it closed in on Garfiel’s arm, hoisted and seconds from slamming into the woman, the knife ready to slice the appendage in two. But—

Garfiel: “—Fuckin’ cheek!!”

Frederica: “———!?”

Garfiel shouted; it didn’t matter if Frederica’s voice had reached him or not. His arm exploded in girth, golden fur coating it, the thing thick as a log, clearly not the limb of any human but instead that of an animal.

Even the woman had to look rattled.

With a roar, Garfiel slammed his fist and the shield into the woman’s stomach.

Of course, having paid not a speck of care to dodging, the knife protruded from Garfiel’s arm. But it had failed to cut through the thick limb and its coat of wiry fur entirely.

Woman: “—Guh!?”

Garfiel: “Get outta here, woman!!”

Entirely bothered by the pain, the swing of Garfiel’s fist blasted the woman away. Unable to kill the momentum, she slammed into the ground, proceeding to bounce and roll further across the floor.

Garfiel watched her tumble as he yanked the knife out of his shoulder. Fangs severed the connecting string, their owner then tossing the knife out a nearby window.

Garfiel: “Ha! «Kurgan slayed the enemy even at the cost of his arms»! If ya think I’m gonna freak out ‘n shrink back at some pain, yer dead wrong, moron!”

Frederica: “The one being a moron is you!”

Garfiel: “Gah!?”

His sister’s fist struck the back of his head after his victorious boast. Garfiel crouched down, glancing back in protest to the unforeseen reprimand.

Frederica: “Fighting in a manner which injures yourself... Grandmother would cry if she saw this.

Garfiel: “Ah, guh... A—ain’t like I don’t know what the granny’d think of it...”

Frederica: “Is that how you are referring to Grandmother!? I do not recall raising you to be like this!”

Garfiel: “We ain’t seen each other since I was four, ‘n finally when we get our reunion yer doin’ this, yer the one who’s bein’ unbelievable here!”

Garfiel breathing jarred. Frederica also glanced forward, to find a black silhouette languidly getting up. The woman quietly lifted herself, flipping the knife around in her hand before catching the blood dripping from her mouth on her finger and licking it. A lovely smile arose on her face.

Woman: “—Wonderful, you are. Very wonderful. A lively boy.”

Garfiel: “Honestly, my amazin’ self wasn’t thinkin’ ya’d get right back after that one either. My bad, underestimated ya a lil’.”

Garfiel pressed his hands together as he apologized. The exchange did not exactly seem like one between two monsters trying to kill each other, but it did lead Frederica to forget the passing of time for a moment.

She shook her head, getting herself back together.

Frederica: “Garf! This woman is shrouded in mystery. Take care not to slacken your guard...”

Garfiel: “I’m sayin’ I got that. But anyway. Sist... Sis, d’you know a girl called Rem?”

Frederica: “...? Yes, she is in this mansion. I, hm, heard that she is Ram’s younger sister.”

Frederica wasn’t conclusively certain about that point either. She had known Ram since childhood, and those memories included no younger sisters of hers. But Subaru explained that Rem was Ram’s younger sister, and she did resemble her to a shocking degree. Apparently, she was suffering from a affliction which erased her from everyone’s memories, damage caused by the Witch Cult.

Garfiel: “She look like Ram?”

Frederica: “Exactly like Ram. But that is no pardon for you to use her as a replacement.”

Garfiel: “I ain’t gonna do anythin’ scummy like that. Jus’ wanted to check— Okay then.”

During their conversation, the woman rolled her shoulders and rotated her legs, checking her physical condition. Perhaps she was giving them time to have their conversation. Her thoughts weren’t exactly clear. Either way—

Garfiel: “Sis, if she’s somewhere on this floor, find an openin’ ’n bring her out. My amazin’ hands are gonna be full dealin’ with her.”

Frederica: “W—what are you saying? I will be fighting as well. With us together, our chances...”

Woman: “I truly wonder about that.”

Frederica looked at the woman wearing a sharp gaze, when the woman concealed her smile beneath her knife.

Woman: “Please don’t make such scary expressions. And I believe that your little brother will prove I’m not wrong in my statements.”

Frederica: “...Garf?”

Frederica’s brows furrowed in confusion, calling her brother’s name. In response, Garfiel adjusted the angle of his shields.

Garfiel: “Sorry, sis. This ain’t someone easy enough that I can keep worryin’ ‘bout what’s goin’ on behind me.”

Frederica: “Wha—!”

Frederica was speechless after being judged as an impairment. While she did recognize that her own abilities did not even touch that of the woman, it was still insulting to hear that she would be so useless she would be a detriment.

Garfiel: “Don’t go misunderstandin’ me, sis. I ain’t sayin’ yer a detriment.”

Frederica: “...Then what are you saying?”

Garfiel: “If me ‘n this chick get serious, this place’s gonna turn into a warzone.”

Garfiel pointed at himself, then to the woman. She smiled happily, as if affirming his words. She fiddled with her braid before stooping down forward.

Woman: “Exactly. And so it would be best that you stand down.”

Battle— a sense which only the truly strong could comprehend.

Recognizing that she was far outclassed, frustration blazed inside Frederica. She had reunited with her brother after ten years, and she could not even assist him at all.

Garfiel: “Stop thinkin’ bout pointless crap, sis.”

Frederica: “Garf.”

Garfiel: “Look at my arms. These shields are the ones me and you played with when we were little. The strength I have now, it started with me ‘n you.”

Frederica’s eyes widened to Garfiel’s words.

Concern, care, and something other than those emotions came through in his voice. Frederica felt that her younger brother had matured, her heart growing hot.

Garfiel: “The Captain still handed my ass to me with the power of numbers. But when I’m in top shape that story starts changin’.”

Stepping forward, Garfiel clicked his teeth, battered his shields together. And,

Garfiel: “Come at me, bitch in black. This’s my celebration for leavin’ Sanctuary. ‘N I’m startin’ it by utterly wreckin’ the first barrier in my way!!”

Arc 4 Chapter 123A - Bowel Hunter vs Shield of Sanctuary

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 14, Chapter 7 “A Howling Reunion”, Parts 3-4; Volume 15, Chapter 1 “The Final Day of Roswaal Manor”, Part 2

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by SummaryAnon – [Complete](#), Page 110

Subaru: “Got it? In total there are four people in the mansion we have to save. They’re all girls.”

Inside the high-speed carriage, Subaru raised four fingers as he explained.

The scenery flowed by as they sped along the rugged road. But even so, no wind nor jolting assaulted their carriage. While vaguely finding it a mystifying sensation no matter how many times he experienced it, Subaru nodded to the two people looking at his raised fingers.

Subaru: “First is Frederica. Our buddy Garfiel’s older sister. If we assume the attacker’s already there, Frederica’s the only one who could buy us any time.”

Garfiel: “Sis, hmm... Ain’t seen her for ten years now.”

Looking uneasy, Garfiel scratched at his short, blond hair. He had been so stubborn about staying in Sanctuary. It was going to be hard for him to face Frederica, who had abandoned Sanctuary for the outside world.

Otto: “You truly have not seen her in a decade? From the Margrave and Ram-san’s accounts, it sounds as though they travelled between the mansion and Sanctuary rather frequently.”

Garfiel: “It woulda been awkward for sis too. She never came along with that asshole Roswaal... she did send a bunch of letters though, apparently.”

Otto: “Apparently?”

Garfiel: "Gave them all to granny w'out readin' them."

Garfiel averted his gaze, looking sulky. His awkward attitude toward his sister was exactly that of a child, so their reunion was definitely going to be an emotional one.

Subaru sighed. Otto's impression of that whole issue looked to be about the same as his as he pulled the reins.

Otto: "Then the second would be Petra-chan."

Subaru: "Yeah. The second one's the Roswaal mansion's precocious and hopeful new maid, Petra. She's a completely ordinary village girl with no underside at all, so if she gets targeted it's one-hundred percent bad."

The attacks on Roswaal mansion so far had ended in dead Petras one-hundred percent of the time. The other three people were also highly likely to die, but Petra had no means to fight back at all. So she was often dealt with pretty quickly. If they were going to protect her, they would need to find her immediately.

Subaru: "Next is Rem. She's Ram's younger sister. Though you probably don't remember her."

Garfiel: "I'm still 'n disbelief 'bout it, Captain. The idea of Ram havin' an identical twin sister. How the hell could I forget that, when my amazin' self's known her such a long time?"

Subaru: "It's a curse that made even Ram forget her. Talking about ways to deal with that is beside the point, but... Anyway, Rem's not so urgent. The assassin attacking the mansion, Elsa, doesn't have Rem on her list of targets. I don't think her employer knew about Rem's existence when they hired her."

Otto: "Although, should she discover Rem-san sleeping in the mansion, I doubt the encounter will end peacefully."

Subaru: "...You're right about that."

It was Elsa they were talking about here. Rem might not be on her commissioner's list, but if she discovered her, she would probably do something just for kicks. And while Subaru had not seen it himself, Rem had been killed during these loops.

All he could do was to pray Rem was not in a room that Elsa just happened to open.

Otto: “Regardless, this dependence on the opponent’s decisions can’t be called an overly great strategy.”

Subaru: “Where I’m depending on you guys, and also depending on the enemy. This is Natsuki Subaru’s brand of warfare, dubbed *Gyaku Fuurinkazan*¹⁷⁹.”

Garfiel: “S—so cool...!”

Garfiel clenched his fists, eyes sparkling.

The fact his random stupid statement had given Garfiel such expectations made even Subaru feel guilty. He decided that later, once they had more time on their hands, he would teach Garfiel about actual *Furinkazan*.

Resolved, he furrowed his brows as he looked at Garfiel, and began “Though...”,

Subaru: “I mean it’s been horrifying watching this, but is that actually seriously working?”

Garfiel: “Well we’re in a rush, ain’t we? If there were any better way, my amazin’ self’d go for that instead.”

Said Garfiel, looking displeased. His words were sensible, but Subaru’s statement really could not be avoided. This was because Garfiel was presently outside the carriage, holding on to it, while talking with Subaru and Otto through the window.

His hands clutched the window frame as he dangled there, hanging alongside the zooming carriage with his feet brushing across the ground, getting dragged along by the vehicle. Subaru had seen an enemy get mashed in a carriage’s wheels before, and considering the possibility of Garfiel’s hands slipping could end up in a repeat, Subaru didn’t really feel calm about it.

Subaru: “If something goes wrong and you get smushed, my PTSD will kick in and we also stop having anything we can do about the mansion.”

¹⁷⁹ Not really an English flip, but I’m keeping this in Japanese (逆風林火山). The literal translation is “Reverse Wind Forest Fire Mountain”. Part of it is a popularized version of the battle standard used by a feudal lord in the Sengoku period (for more info, see [here](#)).

Garfiel: “The hell, Captain, you’re bein’ a damn worrywart. Everythin’s all fine. Just watch this! N’t this n’t this! N’t this, n’t this!”

Subaru: “Stop!! I’m gonna die!! I’m gonna die before you do!!”

Using the window frame as the pivot, Garfiel started spinning round and round using just his arm strength. These acrobatics were made possible by the Divine Protection of Wind Evasion and Garfiel’s inhuman grip. And his hold on the frame was so strong that the thing warped and creaked. Subaru could imagine the pending despair of the carriage’s owner, Otto.

Otto: “His Divine Protection of Earth Spirits doesn’t come into effect unless his feet are touching the ground. Since we need Garfiel to be in top form, or something close to it once we reach the mansion, we can only rationalize this as a necessary measure.”

Subaru: “I mean I get the logic. You know, from an outside perspective this looks like us speeding as fast as we can to shake off some guy trying to get in the carriage. But what’s actually happening is that we threw a fourteen-year-old out of the carriage to drag him along the ground while zooming at top speed.”

Otto: “You do realize how preposterous both those perspectives sound when you use that phrasing!?”

Otto, handling the reins, probably wanted to avoid giving that first impression. But the two dragons tirelessly pulling the carriage, Patrasche and Frufoo, paid little heed to the coachman’s intentions and continued running ceaselessly.

This was approximately the reason why Garfiel was using this rather-acrobatic means of locomotion. Emilia’s magic had healed his serious wounds back in Sanctuary, but that hadn’t replenished his lost blood nor Mana.

The travel distance between Sanctuary and the mansion was about half a day’s worth. Even if they had the dragons sprinting at full speed, how much time could Subaru and the others really spend on convalescing?

Garfiel, his Divine Protection of Earth Spirits amassing power from the ground, was still their trump card. Subaru and Otto were only there to arrange a setting where he could fight at his best.

Garfiel: “But anyway, y’stopped talkin’ halfway, Captain.”

Subaru: "Huh?"

Garfiel: "The thing we were talkin' bout. We gotta save four people, 'n we only got three. I haven't heard 'bout this last person. Who's she?"

Pulling himself up, Garfiel peeked looked into the dragon carriage. He gave Otto a questioning gaze as well, but Otto just shook his head and shrugged.

Otto: "I'm afraid that I haven't encountered this final person either. I was in the mansion for approximately a week... But I never even saw her in passing."

Garfiel: "You haven't even seen her face 'n she hates ya so much she doesn't wanna see you, are ya gonna be okay, my dude?"

Otto: "I would like to think that is not the reason I've failed to see her!"

Otto frantically voiced his objection as Garfiel watched on with pity. Subaru struck his fist against the seat, sighing at the sight of the other two's exchange.

Subaru: "The last one... Beatrice, probably, won't come out unless it's me."

Otto and Garfiel shut their mouths as they looked at Subaru. The seriousness in his voice probably meant they believed him, even without asking why. Truly reassuring companions.

Subaru: "I'm taking Beatrice out of there. Dragging her out of there. I need to do it."

Nobody else. Subaru must be the one.

Even if Beatrice was gonna put on a show, acting like she didn't want it.

Garfiel: "If that's what ya say then that's what it is, Captain."

Otto: "If possible, I think we should evacuate the nearby villagers in Arlam as well. It will avoid some chaos. How about I do it?"

The two each showed their support for Subaru's decision. Subaru had his role. And they had theirs.

Truly, entirely, dependable people.

Subaru: “Thank you, ya two morons.”

Otto: “He’s incapable of giving an honest thanks, the moron!”

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The battle escalated entirely, spreading destruction across the luxurious mansion.

Garfiel: “—Ooooh!!”

Elsa: “Ah!!”

Steel clashed against steel, shrieking metal was accompanied by showers of sparks, the blows and slashes destroying the mundane life of the moonlit Roswaal mansion. The windowpane shattered, the shards of glass scattering. Damage to the floor sent the carpet flying, while paintings hanging on the wall splintered to fragments.

Woman: “Wonderful. You’re excellent.”

Garfiel: “It doesn’t make me happy to hear that from anyone ‘cept Ram!!”

Garfiel jabbed with his shielded right arm, passing past the woman as she dodged aside, for the strike to slam into the wall. He pursued her in her escape, using the momentum from his right arm to pivot in the air, striking her backhanded with his left.

Woman: “Bad luck.”

Garfiel: “It ain’t over yet!”

The woman dodged. But before she could swing her blade, Garfiel wrenched his body again to dislodge his right arm from the wall, sending a strike hurtling for her. The woman aborted her downward slash to raise her arm, using the kickback to flip backward through the air— the instant that Garfiel’s blow skirted past the woman’s feet, the room ruptured.

Backhand blow to the left. Punch to the right.

Sweep leg back and to the left. Jab to the right.

Pivot and kick to the left.

Striking blow after blow as he spun, Garfiel had no leniency in his pursuit of the woman. She had no room to do anything except avoid Garfiel's assault, and sensing that her feet had reached the end of the corridor, Garfiel raised his head.

Garfiel: "Yer done!!"

Stepping forward, Garfiel unleashed his fists. The punches drilled through the air, silver reflections of moonlight shooting through the dark corridor in violent pursuit of the woman. These were the arms of a beast, so powerful that they would assuredly turn a human body into gore. With her back to the wall, the woman flicked up her leg to place the sole of her right foot against the wall also.

She aimed at the incoming punches looking to counter, jabbing out her dagger so that Garfiel would impale himself on its blade. Metal clashed against metal as the knife was caught between the shields. However—

Garfiel: "Like that trick's gonna work!"

Her plan must've been to slip her dagger between the shields, skewering Garfiel with her knife placed in the path of his charge. But Garfiel's muscles were not so weak that a woman's skinny arms would accomplish something.

With the kukri's point still between the shields, Garfiel twisted aside to snap the dagger apart. But before he did—

Woman: "Then what if I add another trick?"

Using her wall-set foot as the pivot, the woman flipped upwards. Instantly, the woman's foot struck the handle of her trapped knife, opening a slight gap between the shields. And into that opening,

Woman: "Here's the real thing."

Garfiel: "—!?"

Now entirely upside down, the woman held yet another knife in her other, left hand. This was her third ominous-looking kukri. Just how many was she hiding on her?

The thin knife easily slipped into the gap between the dagger and shields. The deadly blade did not even whistle through the air as it pressed forward, aiming to slice Garfiel's neck off. Even if he transformed at that very second, the strike would hit the most lethal of spots. But Garfiel instead chose a fiendish way to counter the blade.

Woman: "Incredible."

Garfiel: "—Yher prhahise ain't ghonha mhake me happy!"

The woman whispered, enraptured. Garfiel had spread his head forward. His sharp fangs had literally bit the woman's left blade to a stop. Blood dripped from the shallow cuts at the corners of his mouth, the knife's metallic stench piercing his nostrils.

Garfiel: "Fhuckin' stinks!!"

Putting force into his jaw, Garfiel snapped the knife to bits. He spat out the shattered fragments as he swung his clawed foot up to punt the still-inverted woman from below. The force of the kick would burst her skull apart—to counter it, she sacrificed her arm.

It sounded like a wet cloth had been slapped against the wall, pure scarlet splattering over the hallway. Garfiel used his sleeve to wipe the blood from his face and exhaled heavily out his nose as he glanced back.

Several meters away, having escaped the dead end, stood that woman. But with many bones broken from her wrist to her shoulder, her left arm hanged crooked and twisted.

Garfiel: "Pretty fuckin' good to get away by losin' only an arm. Crap, my mouth hurts."

Woman: "...Huhu, thank you. Ahh... it hurts. It truly does. I feel alive."

Garfiel: "Eh? Not just cuttin' others, ya like getting' cut yerself too? Now that ain't somethin' my amazin' self can understand. Not that I was thinkin' to understand ya at all."

The woman dripped blood as she smiled splendidly, bringing about visceral disgust in Garfiel. He battered his shields together—and noticed, behind the woman, something,

Garfiel: “Hey, sis. What are you still doin’ over there? Like ya just saw, it doesn’t feel like I can show you me bein’ cool th’whole time. Get off to doin’ what ya have to be do.”

Frederica: “...I—indeed. I shall.”

Frederica had not actually been watching in silence but been petrified and unable to move. That was how extra-dimensional the fight between Garfiel and the woman was.

If Frederica had gotten involved in this battle, she would swiftly withdraw after the first few blows. These two were just that superior.

Frederica kept her attention on the woman’s back as she glanced at her destination— Rem’s sleeping room. It was only a few meters away, and she was much closer to the room than the woman was, but she could envision herself reaching its door before her.

If only she could at least reach the room, she would be able to shoulder Rem and escape out the inside window.

Woman: “You don’t need to be so guarded, older sister.”

Frederica: “...Huh?”

Woman: “Right now, I am stricken with your little brother. It doesn’t bother me what business you have in whatever room, or what you’re going to do there. None of my interest is devoted to that.”

Frederica: “—!”

The woman did not even glance back as she assured Frederica’s safety.

She probably was not lying. She did not seem like the kind of person to trick the enemy in this manner, and she did not need to, either. Above all, anyone listening would hear the sincerity in her words.

Right now, the entirety of her attention was devoted to Garfiel. She truly could not give less of a care about Frederica.

But the woman emitted an aura so dreadful that it could engulf the whole mansion. A pungent, violent bloodlust, which made her initial foreboding air look like a child's joke.

Garfiel: "Sis."

Frederica: "—I believe in you."

Frederica traversed through the corridor, drowning in the woman's ghastliness, to reach her destined room—

Frederica: "——"

—After glancing at Garfiel one last time, Frederica slipped into the room. Witnessing this, Garfiel sighed deeply.

Garfiel: "Yer so unruffled that ya can overlook sis... That ain't what's happenin' here, is it."

Woman: "Do I look like a good enough cheater to stay unruffled when faced with such a wonderful partner? Right now, I am yours, and only yours— Ahh, I can't bear it."

Both radiant allure and blood-iron horror coexisted in the grisly woman as she smiled. Bathed in her fiery, passionate gaze, Garfiel spreaded his stance and stooped his body low.

Garfiel: "Honestly, yer just fuckin' gross. I'm rippin' ya apart and manglin' ya to shreds."

Woman: "I promise to extract your guts without hurting them too."

Her left arm still dangling, the woman's healthy right arm readied her knife. She stooped down so low that her breasts could touch the floor—

Woman: "I am the Bowel Hunter, Elsa Granhiert."

Garfiel: "...The Strongest of Shields, Garfiel Tinsel."

The instant the introductions were over, Elsa moved before her opponent. Elsa's smile phased into blank darkness as she dashed, so swift she gave no impression of being wounded. The instant that Garfiel heard

the first footstep, the noise of pounding against the walls echoed, again and again and again, from every direction.

Elsa kicked off the floor, off the walls, off the ceiling as she closed in on Garfiel. She moved so fast that he could not focus his aim, and moved like no creature he had seen before. No humanoid nor beast would approach other resorting to these nightmarish movements.

And the most surprising thing was that she was obviously faster now than she was before being wounded.

Garfiel: “Entertainin’!!”

Garfiel bared his fangs, laughed, and took action again that jumping shadow. If the enemy was using tricky movements to approach, then Garfiel would counter by doing the same. He put his hands and feet to the floor. And off his rear foot, exploded.

Garfiel, the human-sized bullet, shot down the mansion’s corridor. He positioned his shields before him, his charge as ferocious as a tiger’s, the shockwave blasting away the shattered window glass and fragments of wall.

Garfiel: “Gaaaaaaa!!”

He did not observe the consequences, instead roaring as he speared his arm into the floor to force himself to a stop. He immediately flipped himself around and back into bestial posture, and again his rear foot annihilated the floor.

The quake rocked the mansion, the carpets scattering in the destruction, flying about in tatters. Shreds of red cloth caught on Garfiel as he soared, and in that moment—

Garfiel: “———!!”

Elsa: “Ahahahaha!!”

Elsa plummeted down from the ceiling, swinging her blade as she laughed, assaulting the zooming Garfiel’s shield. The violent shockwave stabbed through eardrums as destruction rocked the moonlit corridor.

Elsa laughed as she rebounded, making a breakneck flip sideways. The force of the slash had shifted Garfiel's course, sending him plummeting head-first into the wall. He busted through the stonework to land gracelessly in a guest room.

Garfiel: "Bah!"

Plumes of white dust shadowed the area as Garfiel grabbed the leg of the nearby bed. His biceps swelled so he would easily lift the hundred-kilo bed, tossing it back out the hole he had just came through. Boom, bust, and from beyond the bisected bed hailed the black woman's thrown blade.

Garfiel parried it with his left shield, using his right to slam the approaching Elsa in the face. But she ducked, the strike merely grazing her braid. Immediately after the end of her black hair tickled the tip of Garfiel's nose, he then zoomed forward, obeying the the feeling terror rushing up his spine. He barely managed to dodge the slash coming to slice up through his groin, his back instead taking the hit as he blasted though the door. The battle zone relocated back to the corridor.

Giving him no time to catch his breath, Elsa ran hot in pursuit of Garfiel. Garfiel kicked at her skinny waist, but it did not feel like it had connected. Elsa contorted her body strangely to evade, and dodged the shockwave from the kick as well by shifting ever so slightly; it merely brushed her belly. Garfiel stood stuck, his leg outstretched as the blade of Elsa's kukri butchered the air, closing in.

That was not like the attack she had fired when she had been cornered before. Were Garfiel to try catch this in his mouth, its speed and force would slice his head in two. Garfiel's decision was instantaneous as he caught the sweeping blade on his right shield, allowed its path to continue to his left shield, and then away.

Shrieking metal. Showers of red and yellow sparks. Dark eyes opened in surprise, and the woman's exposed belly. Garfiel roared as he slammed his raised leg to the ground. He took his stance and blitzed to drive his fangs into Elsa's torso, intending to quite appropriately rip open her guts.

Garfiel: "———!"

The fact he aborted his lunge, using the momentum to pull his head in instead, could only be chalked up to instinct.

Late to dodge, Garfiel's left ear went flying off and so he took evasive action through the spray of blood. He put his foot to the wall, dodging the oncoming strike by shooting to the ceiling. Dodging, dodging, dodging everything.

Garfiel's outstretched arm ripped through the ceiling, leading part of the upper floor to collapse. This created an opening in Elsa's pursuit, which Garfiel used to escape. His hands and feet landed on the carpet, and Garfiel used his palm to put pressure on the bleeding coming from his head and its missing ear.

He took a ragged breath and grit his teeth at the burning pain. He saw Elsa cut through the thick smoke, walking closer, and smiled.

Garfiel: "Ya bastard... I'm pretty sure I turned yer left arm useless."

Elsa: "You're right. It hurt. But people's wounds do heal."

Garfiel: "This's just goin' of my lil' knowledge, but when a mangled arm heals we ain't talkin' about humans anymore."

Rather, it transcended the category of living creature.

Garfiel may possess his Divine Protection of Earth Spirits, but he still needed several hours if he meant to make a shattered arm operable again. That was applicable only when on Mana-rich ground, and doing everything he could to mend it. If she could heal during battle, and so quickly to boot, was preposterous.

Subaru had told him beforehand that she didn't die even when killed, and now Garfiel's initial speculation felt legitimate.

Garfiel: "Which makes things quick. Ya ain't no human. Dunno if ya were born human, but either way ya stopped bein' that, at the very least."

Elsa: "You don't look it, but you're surprisingly clever."

Garfiel: "I told ya it only makes me happy when it's Ram praisin' me. 'N anyway, I got an idea 'bout yer weird healin'."

Jabbing out his finger, Garfiel stated his speculation.

Despite everything, despite how surprising it may sound, Garfiel liked books. With nobody to rival him in strength in that tedious Sanctuary, reading had been an important time-killing activity for him.

But that said, the books Garfiel liked were adventure novels, myths, folklore, things in that vein. His interests unfortunately did lie in anything productive like accumulating knowledge.

Garfiel: “In th’books my amazin’ self read, there were lotsa monsters, heroes, those kinda things ya don’t know if they really existed. And one of ’em just like you.”

Elsa: “...I’d like it if you didn’t equate me to a phantasm from a picture book.”

Garfiel: “It was no picture book, ‘twas one full of letters. It did have some pictures in it but whatever, that doesn’t matter. And I can’t say it was a phantasm for sure.”

Looking indifferent, Elsa listened to Garfiel. This habit of hers to entertain conversations to the end really did not mesh well with the ferocious impression she gave during a fight.

Garfiel would have that face of hers go pale.

Garfiel: “After all, yer the same as one of the old Witches.”

Elsa: “———”

The swaying motion of her dagger halted. Elsa’s dark eyes looked nonchalantly at Garfiel. He jabbed his finger at her,

Garfiel: “—Yer a goddamn vampire!”

Elsa: “Not that I drink blood or anything.”

With a sigh, Elsa kicked off the ground.

Her left arm had healed completely. She wielded kukri in both hands as she closed in on Garfiel. He blocked her sweeping slash by raising his shields, simultaneously shooting his right leg out to kick her—which Elsa met by launching her own kick along the exact same trajectory, the two of them crashing feet-first into each other and blasting away.

Garfiel: “Not fuckin’ cool! Yer arm’s seriously all back t’normal!?”

Elsa: “But didn’t you heal your ear as well, while you were buying time? We’re even.”

Garfiel mentally stuck his tongue out at her, wondering if he had been exposed.

During their time talking, Garfiel had used the hand plugging his wound to heal the injury with magic. He hoped for the missing section of his ear to steadily heal back, but if he suffered a wound equal to what Elsa had suffered, then Garfiel’s healing magic would only amount to a quick and dirty stop-gap.

Garfiel: “Ya ain’t denyin’ it. So yer really a vampire?”

Elsa: “People can call it whatever they want. I don’t suck blood, and my meals are ordinary. When I’m out in the sunlight, all that happens is that the guards get riled, but that doesn’t matter.”

Garfiel: “So yer on about guts so much because yer a vampire?”

Elsa: “That’s my hobby. I just like gazing at fresh colorful guts and touching warm-looking intestines.”

Garfiel: “That’s way fuckin’ creepier.”

Elsa shed and dumped her impeding black cloak. Garfiel judged that now, Elsa was motivated even further and clicked his teeth. He battered his shields together—

Garfiel: “It’s a big world... Bit of a drag, but ya better pull it off, Captain.”

With that, Garfiel roared as he brought his shields down at the oncoming Elsa.

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—He opened the door, the scent of paper emanating from the room.

Perhaps the cloying smell carried the weight of all the days and years spent closed inside this space. Or perhaps, if you considered calling it a room stopped in time, days really had nothing to do with it.

Subaru: “Got stuck for some time in Sanctuary and thought about all that stuff. And one of the things I wanna hear is your answer.”

Beatrice: “—How come?”

Without its guardian’s permission, Subaru entered the Library. As always, the mood here was both melancholic and tranquil. There were no windows to let in the sun, nor for ventilation. Staying at this place for a long time was bound to worsen your mood and your health.

All the more so when the expression of the girl watching Subaru was so utterly exhausted.

Beatrice: “How come you managed to reach this room again, I suppose? I don’t remember calling you, in fact.”

Subaru: “Sorry, but showing up uninvited is just engrained in me. Impossible to forget that time back in middle school where I showed up uninvited to a friend’s birthday party and made the whole thing awkward.”

Even dense Subaru had decided to be more prudent after that one. Though, since he had announced “Well, that’s all for today!” and left the place being more noisy than anyone else, he stopped getting invited to anybody’s birthday party.

Subaru: “It’s miserable and my heart’s about a second from breaking from the pain, so let’s stop talking about that topic.”

Beatrice: “You’re the one who brought it up, I suppose. You’re like that about everything, doing things always of your own accord, in fact.”

Subaru: “Yup, always of my accord. So, no matter how much you hate it, I’m here.”

He saw the girl in front of him swallow her breath.

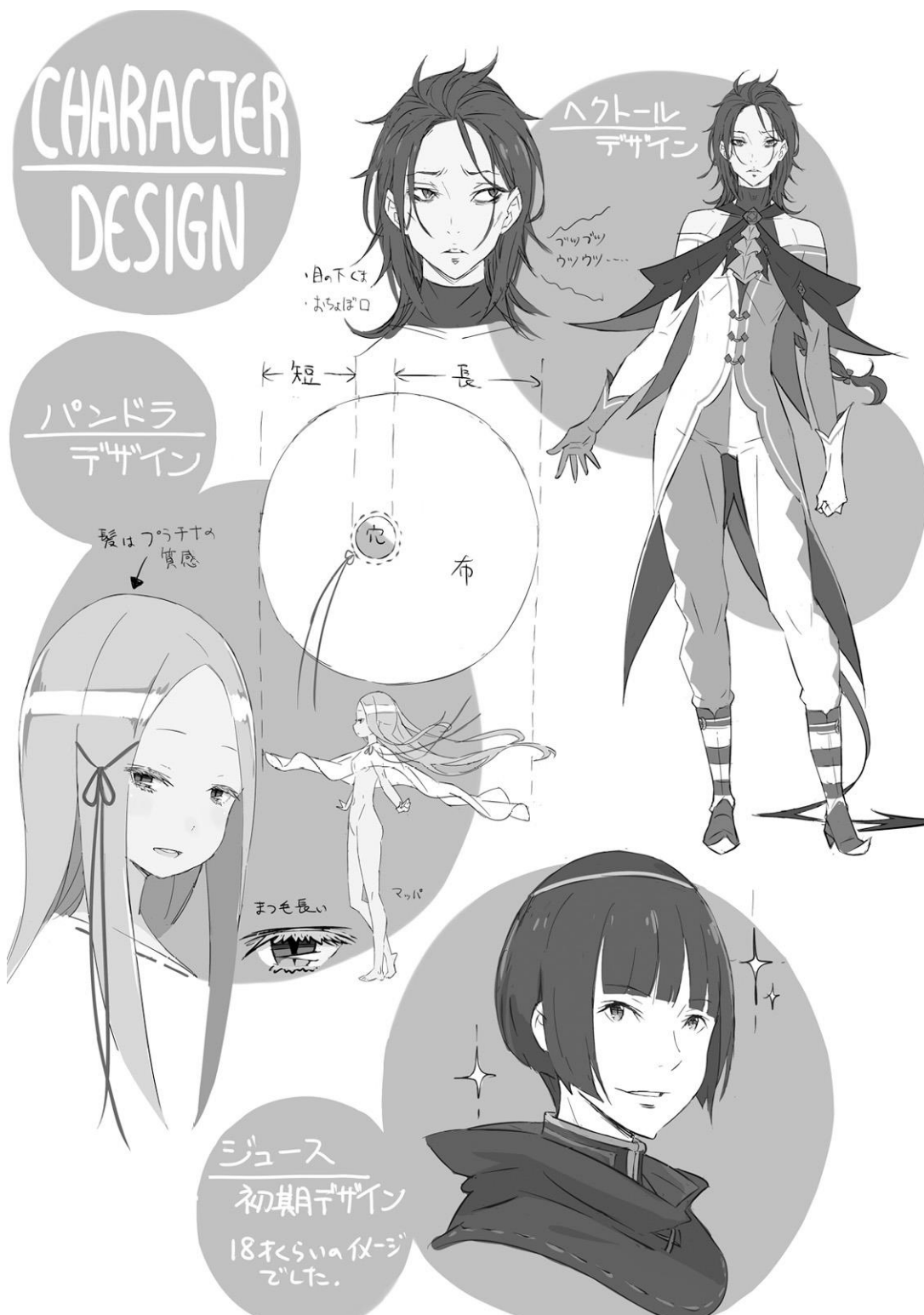
After respectfully bowing his head in a way that she could see it—

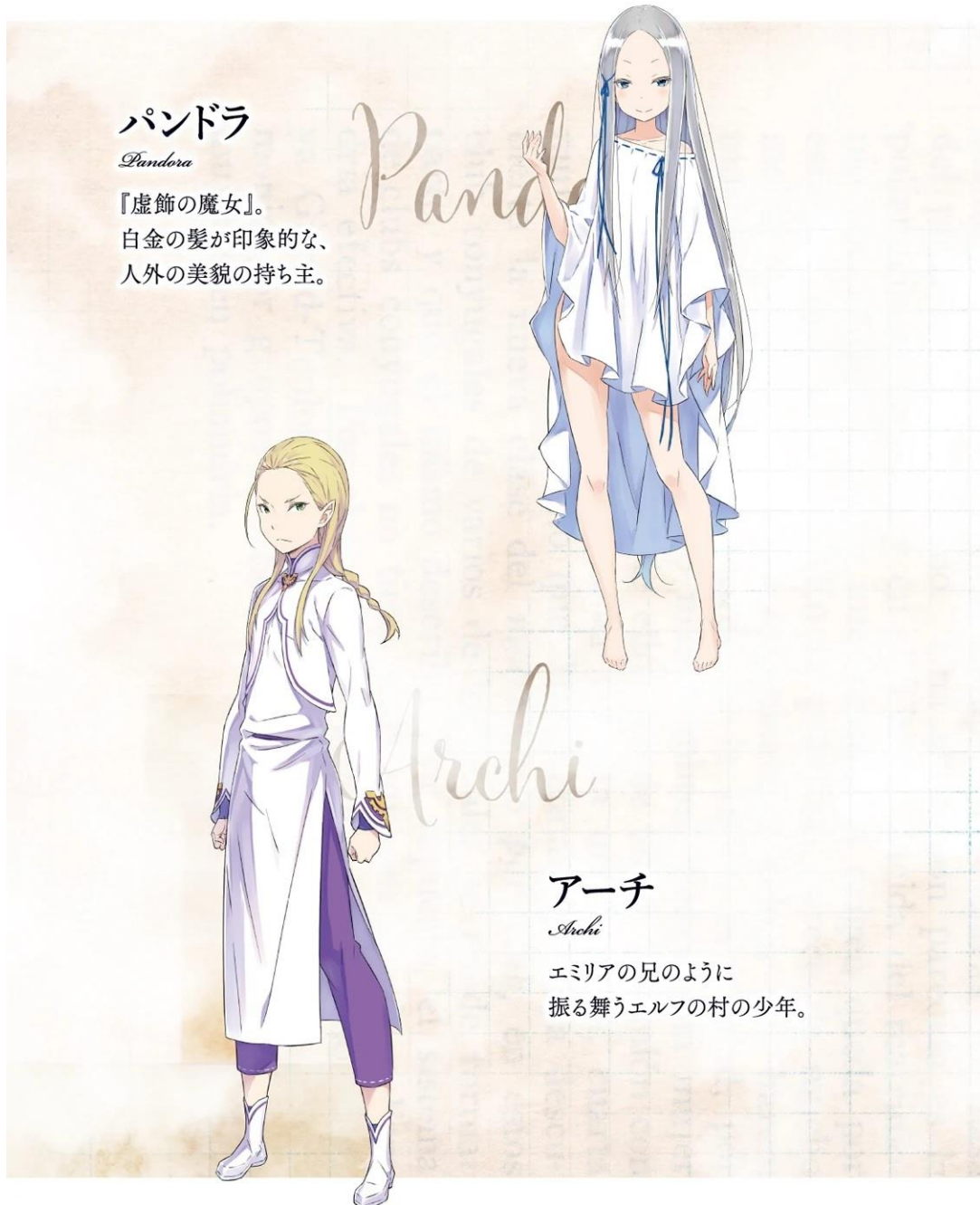
Subaru: “I’m taking you out of here, Beatrice— I’m dragging you out into the sunshine, where we’ll play until your dress is caked completely brown with mud.”

Hearing Subaru's caustic words, the girl Beatrice sat as she always did, on the stepladder, cradling herself.

With the black tome cradled in her arms as always, her wavering eyes gazing at Subaru.

Character Pages for Volume 14





Web Novel Volume 15



Arc 4 Chapter 124A - Listen Up, Stupid

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 15, Chapter 1 “The Final Day of Roswaal Manor”, Parts 3-4

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by SummaryAnon — [Complete](#), Page 138

—How many times had he come to this room to see her?

The first time they met, Subaru had easily foiled the girl’s illusory looping hallway and entered the Forbidden Library.

Their first impressions of each other were mutually horrid.

Beatrice drained the Mana of someone still midway through convalescence, and promptly downed Subaru. Afterwards, she had to put up with his endless revenge-inspired meddling. They would insult each other every time they met, but despite that, they got along ridiculously well, and Subaru found himself stopping by the supposedly-hidden Forbidden Library.

Subaru and Beatrice had had many yelling matches, spit flying everywhere, one immature exchange after another, over the nearly two months Subaru had been in the mansion.

After the Royal Selection began in earnest, and Subaru returned from the Capital, those exchanges changed.

Beatrice rejected him. With the knowledge he had gained in a Sanctuary without her, Subaru had learned her history and fate, and accordingly understood some of the reasons behind her stubbornness. After that, he prattled as if he knew anything, trying to understand her solitude— and Beatrice, long bereft of tears after these four-hundred years, wailed her laments.

There was nothing he could have said to the exhausted girl after that. Immediate circumstances led Beatrice to lose her life, and Subaru saw that final expression on her face as she protected him.

That expression had seared itself into his memory. Running off his emotions, Subaru returned here.

—So that this time, no matter what it took, he would get her out of this place.

Beatrice: “Taking me out of here...?”

That was Beatrice’s bewildered response to Subaru’s grand opening statement. She hugged the Gospel tighter, drawing her knees to her chest as she sat atop the stepladder.

Beatrice: “Unwanted meddling, I suppose. Nobody asked for you to do that, in fact.”

Subaru: “This isn’t a matter of someone asking or not asking me. I’m taking you out of here. That’s my decision.”

Beatrice: “Just scram and have that foolish girl comfort you on her lap, I suppose.”

Subaru: “You little... This is war! You say something like that and it’s war!”

Beatrice brought up a topic back from back when Subaru had been overloaded in this mansion, and he strained his voice to distract from his internal shame.

Beatrice snorted at his attitude and glanced away.

Subaru: “Anyway, this isn’t the time to be joking around like this. We have basically no room to postpone anything. Have you grasped what’s going on outside?”

Beatrice: “...I do know that some uninvited guests have come to the mansion, in fact. After the big and little maid did something or other, two preposterous people started going on a rampage, I suppose.”

Subaru: “Though, one of those preposterous people’s a helper I brought along. I don’t think he will lose in fighting power, but unfortunately, I get the feeling that the winner will be decided by the difference in their resolve. So I can’t accommodate too much of your solemnity here.”

Beatrice: “Then you’re evacuating the mansion’s residents while your assistant buys time... That’s your scheme, in fact. Are you even trusting in your ally with this sloppy strategy, I suppose?”

Subaru: “The strategy is this because I know he’s way too kind.”

The restorative effects of Garfiel's Divine Protection of Earth Spirits did mean that his current condition was eighty to ninety percent of his maximum. When adding on his lack of hesitation for battle, he was quite the magnificent fighting force. But Subaru doubted that he would have sufficient resolve to kill his opponent, which would keep him from putting in his all. So, his evaluation was just a tad negative.

Meanwhile, Elsa was in perfect condition. Subaru judged her strange, unexplainable combat strength as a good match for Garfiel at his best. Her tendency to enjoy herself during her battles was something of a disadvantage for her in combat, but she had that inexplicable immortality. Elsa's statements did not suggest that killing her indefinite times would make her stay dead either. Subaru's tentative estimations dictated that Elsa had the slight advantage.

Subaru: "But if the strategy is working, Frederica should collect Rem while Garfiel's suppressing Elsa. Petra met up with Otto, so now there's only one essential evacuee left before we can save everybody."

Beatrice: "Essential evacuees... You mean to say that Betty is the last, in fact."

Subaru: "Yeah, I do."

Subaru had instructed Petra go meet up with Otto, who had guided the villagers in Arlam to safety, and retreat after helping with a few gambits in the mansion. Subaru had spent some time reaching the Library, so Petra should have departed by now.

Subaru: "And so I'm getting you out of here. If you don't wanna run while holding my hand, then I'll carry you on piggyback you or cradle you or do whatever to you, so just behave and come over here and..."

Beatrice: "Don't make me repeat myself over and over, I suppose. I don't need your help, in fact."

Subaru stepped closer, offering Beatrice his hand, but she lowered her voice to reject him. He came to a stop in front of her, as she turned her head in indication of the room.

Beatrice: "Hear me, I suppose? An isolated space, of power worthy of Betty, separated from the corridors of time. That is Beatrice's Forbidden Library, in fact. Regardless what threatens the outside, that threat will never reach Betty's Library. Your fears are needless, in fact."

Subaru: “Nope, they are needed. Your Library’s randomness does mean it has a strong advantage when it comes to fleeing, true... But it has a fatal flaw. And the enemy knows what it is.”

Beatrice: “A fatal flaw?”

Beatrice furrowed her brows, indeed unable to let the comment pass. But Subaru just responded to her harsh gaze with a nod, and gestured to the door behind him.

Subaru: “Your power, which randomly connects to some door in the mansion, is strong. But... It only works on the mansion’s closed doors. So in other words, if you leave the mansion’s doors open... You’re certain to reach the Library eventually, since you’ll be scratching out doors until the Library’s is left.”

Beatrice: “—Hk.”

Subaru: “It’s such a stupid thing. I bet you didn’t notice it either. I was wondering why I hadn’t realized it until I actually witnessed it myself.”

Subaru remembered when Elsa, having noticed the loophole in Door Crossing, had found the Library. If Garfiel was not around to stop her, Elsa would unmistakably arrive at this place using that exact same method. And she would likely take Beatrice’s life.

Subaru: “Though of course, it’s not like I’m underestimating you, or saying that if she shows up here you’re going down easy. It’s just that her strangeness is some of the most extreme I’ve ever seen. There would be nothing better than doing this without facing her.”

If defeating Elsa was possible, then he would prefer it happening. But it was not an essential requirement for clearing this series of loops. If Roswaal was the one hiring her, then as long as Subaru cleared the time limit for the issues in Sanctuary, Roswaal should stop having any reason to keep hiring Elsa.

The whole insignia affair in the Capital proved that this would make Elsa withdraw. Either way, right now they needed to survive through the attack on the mansion and—

Subaru: “Beatrice. This place isn’t safe. If you’re not here, she will not disturb the library. So just for now...”

Beatrice: “Why does that woman know how to break Betty’s Door Crossing, I suppose?”

Subaru: “———”

Subaru spat out the suitable bargaining chips to convince Beatrice to leave.

But Beatrice, perhaps listening to Subaru’s statements, perhaps not, whispered a whisper differing from what Subaru was looking for. Subaru shut his mouth, Beatrice remained upon the stepladder.

Beatrice: “It’s inconceivable that she would so suddenly figure out how to break Betty’s Door Crossing upon her first encounter with it, in fact. Whoever taught her the method knows me, I suppose.”

Subaru: “Beatrice. This isn’t the time for that conversa——”

Beatrice: “——It’s Roswaal, in fact.”

Subaru could not deceive her. Her swift thinking made Subaru swallow his breath.

Seeing his reaction, Beatrice understood everything. Roswaal had hired Elsa, and his goal was to kill Beatrice. Which meant——

Beatrice: “It is written in Roswaal’s Gospel that I be killed, I suppose.”

Giving no heed to either Subaru’s affirmations or denials, Beatrice sighed.

It was unlikely that the relief Subaru perceived in that sigh was just his imagination. Unable to overlook the comment, Subaru put pressure on Beatrice.

Subaru: “Want to tell me what that sigh was? And why the hell do you look like you’re going along with it!?”

Beatrice: “It’s what it looks like, I am going along with it, in fact. If Roswaal’s Gospel has ordered him to do this, then that means my fate is decided, I suppose.”

Subaru: “Why is that... Roswaal’s book is Roswaal’s book, and your book is your book! Does your book really tell you to go get killed by Roswaal, does it!?”

Jabbing out his finger, Subaru glared at the Gospel in Beatrice’s arms. If nothing had changed from the previous loops, then for four-hundred years, that book had written nothing; just blank, white paper.

Beatrice's expression turned gloomy, then opening to a page of the Gospel. She spread the book open and presented it so that Subaru could see it— Showing a book of only empty pages.

Beatrice: "Nothing is written, in fact. Identical as ever, only blank pages, I suppose."

Subaru: "Then there's no reason for you to get killed like Roswaal's book says! It's same as ever, you're who decides what you do!"

Beatrice: "...The same as ever, I'm the one deciding?"

Subaru: "Yes! Nothing being written means you must've faced choices during all this time. Small things to big things, you're the one who decided every path you took! So there's no reason for you to dance along to someone else's choices this time, eith—"

Beatrice: "What in my life have I ever decided?"

That doleful question crushed Subaru's momentum. Beatrice tilted her head as she gazed at Subaru, her eyes melancholic. Flipping through the blank pages—

Beatrice: "All the time Betty spent in Roswaal's mansion, protecting the Library that Mother entrusted to her, endlessly, forever... When did I ever have time belonging to myself during all that? When did Betty, having lived empty centuries without writ, ever leave her footsteps anywhere in the world? What did Beatrice ever do, and who is she?"

Subaru: "Bea, trice..."

Beatrice: "Betty's life, Betty's four-hundred years, are as blank as this Gospel, in fact. A void, in fact. What I chose by myself, what I gained by myself, what I can attest of myself... Are all non-existent."

Beatrice clapped the Gospel shut and set it on her lap. She stroked its nameless cover as she quietly continued,

Beatrice: "I'm the same as an empty book. Losing me here simply means losing a blank text, devoid of letters. It can never be anything to anybody, merely a book shoved in a bookcase— It would be laudable for it to be gone, in fact."

Subaru: "What if there's people who don't want that blank book gone?"

With a fragile expression, Beatrice felt like she was verging on abandoning her four centuries and her future. Subaru managed to get words out in an attempt to connect to her heart.

Subaru had yet to find his reply to Beatrice's tearful scream from back then. But even so, should he fail to speak here, she would give up on herself.

Subaru: "You called it nothing, a void. But there assuredly is a book wedged inside that bookcase. There are people who know of that book's existence. And maybe there are people who will want to pick up that book someday, do you think they would tolerate that it goes off and destroys itself?"

Beatrice: "The book has neither name nor author, I suppose. Even if we suppose this benevolent someone exists, they would only be disappointed after opening that book and seeing its inside would, in fact. The blank book doesn't want to watch disappointment appear in that person's face either, I suppose."

Subaru: "Then! Then what is that book doing in that place!"

Beatrice: "——"

Beatrice gazed emotionlessly at Subaru.

It felt like a retort, one that said the whole dialogue lacked any apparent meaning. Subaru raised his head regardless, continuously reaching out to Beatrice's distant heart.

Subaru: "If someone who picks it up will end up being disappointed nonetheless... Then for what sake is that book there? Wasn't the book made because it had meaning?"

Beatrice: "...The book's author crafted that book for the sake of a person, in fact. The book is made to appear empty to everyone except for that someone, I suppose. If we assume meaning does exist, then the very instant the book reaches that someone the meaning of that book's creation is complete."

Subaru: "And so then——"

Beatrice: "The book must not be disposed of until it reaches that someone, you're saying, I suppose."

Subaru swallowed his breath. He noticed what a cruel breed of hope he was arguing for just an instant before he could voice it. Beatrice saw Subaru's expression, and a horribly pained smile arose on her face.

Beatrice: “Exactly. If Betty truly were just a book... Then she would be happy to wait for that day, in fact.”

Beatrice would have waited there, for that day when that someone’s fingers flipped through her pages.

If she were a book.

—But Beatrice was not a book. She was a little girl, shivering from prolonged isolation.

Beatrice: “If I were a soulless, mindless book... then I could have believed in Mother’s instructions forever, without a fault. I could have been Mother’s lovely Beatrice forever, I suppose.”

If she were an entity like a doll, lacking a heart and comprised only of ornamentation, she would have never deliberated.

If she were an entity like a book, unshaken by the constant passing of time, she would have never lamented.

Beatrice was not that thing.

Beatrice: “But Betty has a heart. Should time pass, I do think about things at least, enough to lose faith in what I believed in, in fact. I agonize and deliberate, I suppose. There were countless nights where I scrambled to salvage my memories, because I’d forgotten what Mother’s face, what her smile looked like!”

Subaru: “———”

Beatrice: “There were times I could not bear being alone, and I yearned to touch someone! But everyone leaves me behind! They will say whatever they will say, state it’s for the sake of something more important than me, give their reasons, and abandon me! Mother! Roswaal! —Ryuzu too!!”

Beatrice shouted, her face scrunched up and nearly tearing up. Hearing the name Ryuzu made Subaru remember what he had heard in Sanctuary about Beatrice’s past. And the origin of all the present Ryuzus, Ryuzu Meyer.

She and Beatrice had only known each other for a fleeting instant, but their story still told of a definite bond— One that still left a persistent scar on Beatrice’s heart.

Beatrice: “—So that’s why it’s fine, in fact.”

Beatrice lost her momentum. The tone of her voice plummeted. Her expression, twisted with emotion, returned to its usual apathy as she hugged the book on her lap close.

Beatrice: “Betty’s Gospel will not outline Betty’s future... I’ve known that for a very long time, in fact. Betty’s fate was forsaken even by Mother a long time ago.”

The lack of writ about the future meant that the Gospel’s owner had fallen into a dead end. While drawing conclusions from Subaru’s possession of Petelgeuse’s Gospel, that was how Beatrice had appraised books with frozen writ. And so she had appraised that the same thing was happening to herself.

Beatrice: “If Betty’s fate has been outlined in Roswaal’s Gospel... How sardonic, I suppose. But that does ease me, in fact. It’s inconceivable that Roswaal would take half-measures, I suppose.”

Subaru: “An old friend of yours might kill you... how is that relaxing?”

Beatrice: “It’s obvious, in fact.”

Beatrice nodded to Subaru’s choked up voice. Then, with a fleeting, affectionate smile arising on her face—

Beatrice: “If Roswaal’s Gospel has written about me... Then it means that Mother has certainly not forgotten about me, I suppose.”

—Warped. Beatrice’s smiling visage made Subaru notice that he was seconds from drowning beneath an emotional torrent.

It was warped. Beatrice’s visage as she basked in contacting with her mother’s love was so warped it was unbearable. Subaru could not stand that this thing, that this happening, was a mother’s love— As fucking if.

Beatrice: “...What are you thinking to do, in fact?”

Subaru bit his lip and endured the sensations welling up in him as he stepped forward. Caution cloaked Beatrice’s expression as she perceived the alarming vibe emanating from Subaru.

Subaru: “———”

Beatrice: “I asked you a question, I suppose. What are you thinking to do, in fact? If you try anything, I’ll show no mercy, I suppose. I’ve already accepted my fate, in fact.”

Subaru: “Accepted what. You’re no different from Roswaal. No, he’s at least self-aware, you’re multitudes more awful. Utterly hopeless, you’re so screwed up.”

Anger surged from inside him.

It was an emotion that Subaru had constantly fought off ever since he began being exposed to all these events in Sanctuary.

Anger at himself while challenging the Trial, anger at the Witches for toying with him, anger at Garfiel for underestimating himself out of childish stubbornness, anger at Roswaal for obeying the writ to try and affirm the fragility of feelings, anger at Emilia for not believing in herself nor in Subaru’s love——

——And now anger at Beatrice, and everyone who had cornered her into this.

Subaru: “You’re stupid. Say whatever about your fate, say whatever about your Mother’s orders, anyone looking from the side is gonna think it’s sad. You have a heart? You can’t be a book? Of course you goddamn can’t, stupid. Did holing up in this moldy room make you incapable of recognizing that?”

Beatrice: “Stu...!”

Beatrice’s eyes shot open, and after a look of surprise—— Indignation.

She got to her feet on the stepladder, her skirt swaying as she pointed at Subaru.

Beatrice: “You! Who do you think you are referring to with that comment, I suppose! I’m stupid, I’m stupid? How do you dare say this, in fact... And especially you! What do you think you could possibly know about Betty, I suppose!”

Subaru: “I know you’re stupid, and you don’t realize you’re stupid, so I’d say I know you better than you do! Stupid! Stupid! Stupid! Stuuuupid!!”

Beatrice: “Y—y—you...!!”

Subaru flipped the bird as he cursed, turning Beatrice's face crimson and blocking off her words. Her rage was too incredible for her to come up with any retort.

Barging into openings like that happened to be Subaru's forte.

Subaru: "A four-hundred year void? Drop your pretenses! You hugged your knees crying for four-hundred years, that's what you did! You had all that time to think, why the hell are you clinging to this single answer forever! The book's not telling you anything, so you think that means «I didn't do anything»? Are you stupid!?"

Beatrice: "O—of course I thought about things, in fact! Naturally I would, I suppose! Can you conceive how many things I tested to see if the Gospel's writ would change! But no matter what I did, no matter how I waited, it didn't! That's why——"

Subaru: "That's what I'm saying is stupid! The book's got nothing in it, so you work to try and make letters appear, the hell is this, invisible ink on a New Year's card? No one does that anymore! If none of that worked, start thinking about other possibilities!"

Beatrice: "O—other, possibilities..."

Subaru: "Correct. Such as the possibility that your mom's book was wrong."

Beatrice fell utterly speechless.

But she immediately snapped at him, determining his reply as moronic,

Beatrice: "You hold your tongue, in fact! Mother would never pull such an idiotic stunt, I suppose! You... You could not possibly comprehend Mother's vast thoughts, in fact!"

Subaru: "Nope, don't know them at all, stupid. Like I care anything about what your mom thinks. What we're talking about is you. And you said it, didn't you? You said that she'd never pull something that idiotic. Really? Can you assert it? Have you never doubted your mother even once?"

Beatrice: "What, are..."

Subaru: “Four-hundred years! Gone with a self-writing book sitting absolutely blank! The person you’re waiting for never came either! You spent all that time alone, had so much time to think it’s ridiculous, and you have never thought of it even once? You seriously never thought that it was strange!?”

Four centuries spent believing in someone.

Perhaps it sounded like a pure way of being. But in truth it was crooked. Especially when spent only ever thinking about the person, about their words. Especially when Beatrice, who does not think her wish will come true, has pretty much given up.

Beatrice: “I—it is inconceivable that Mother would bring about anything incorrect, I suppose! O—of course she wouldn’t, in fact. She is Mother, I suppose! Do you think it possible to doubt the words of your own Mother!?”

Subaru: “Of course I do! I think the stuff my mom says is overwhelmingly lacking in credibility! That time when she misheard news that «a satellite fell into the atmosphere» as «a satellite fell into Aichi prefecture» and I went zooming out with the big scoop without verifying it, is when I stopped trusting her! That was in third year primary!¹⁸⁰”

He would never forget the day he had sincerely accepted that, spread the rumor, and turned into a schoolyard laughingstock.

Subaru never trusted anything his parents said ever again. And he had already deemed his father’s statements as unreliable prior to that.

Subaru: “Four-hundred years, and you never doubted her for even a second!? I’m not even twenty years old, and I’d run out of fingers before I could count the number of fistfights I’ve had with my dad. And that’s just in twenty years. You had twenty times that, and you never felt that way even once, huh?”

Beatrice: “You... What do you wish to make me say, I suppose!? I utterly cannot discern it, in fact! Your aims, the point of your remarks, are utterly unknown to Betty! Unknown!”

Subaru: “Then I’ll say it loud and clear! So that you and your stupid mother can hear it!”

¹⁸⁰ Punny. The former is “大気圏”, read “taikiken”, the latter is “愛知県”, read “Aichiken”.

Beatrice was about ready to clutch her head in frustration when Subaru approached, and took her hands. She looked up. Subaru drew his face close, into breathing range, and declared to the teary girl—

Subaru: “Stop getting thrown around by a blank book and a four-hundred-year-old promise— Be the one who chooses what you want to do, Beatrice.”

Beatrice: “———”

Subaru: “It’s been four-hundred years. Plenty long enough for you to have at least one rebellious phase.”

Beatrice had been trying to obey her parent’s instructions in admirable fashion. Her stubborn volition to keep that promise had spawned her solitude and a timespan of emptiness.

Her mother, Echidna, seemed to find even that time spent in agony as something gratifying, but from Subaru’s perspective it was immoral and profane. She had forgotten how to cry and the feeling of wanting to cry, what the hell was this about a pure way of being. It made him want to puke.

With her hands still in Subaru’s grip and atop the stepladder, Beatrice looked away from Subaru. Her height as she sat on the top step was practically level with Subaru’s eyes. She eventually tilted her head down, lets her lips move, and,

Beatrice: “Th... en... This is, what you’re attempting to say, I suppose. Betty, disobey Mother’s orders.”

Subaru: “...”

Beatrice: “Abandon everything you believed in over these centuries and be free... That is what you are telling Betty so easily, I suppose.”

Her shaking voice gradually regained its composure.

It began to fill with something that is not shock, and Subaru felt his hair standing on end. Ever since coming to this world, this sensation alone was one he had undeniably honed.

That was the sensation of a direly hazardous crisis.

Beatrice: “—Demanding that I, Beatrice! Violate a Contract! Running your mouth as if you know anything!”

Subaru: “—Agh!?”

As if stricken by a blast of gale, Subaru went flying backwards. His back struck the Library floor, still encircled by a wind which then slammed him into the wall. His breathing stalled. His bones creaked all throughout his body, his vision strobing as he raised his head.

Beatrice remained atop the stepladder, but her expression was one of fury as she looked down at Subaru.

Beatrice: “Contracts are absolute! Absolute, in fact! And especially so for Contracts made between a Spirit and a Witch. You demand that it be broken unilaterally, and by the Spirit? You understand nothing, I suppose! Such a thing would never be forgiven! Not anyone! Not anything! And not even I myself would permit it, in fact!”

Subaru: “—That’s rich coming from someone searching for backdoors in that Contract by thinking if they can’t violate it, better try and get killed.”

Beatrice: “———!”

Subaru sighed to force the pain out of him as he sluggishly stood up himself.

Beatrice’s rage was not faltering, and her adorable expression remained thick with malice. Subaru raised his head and laughed venomously.

Subaru: “You’re an incoherent mess, Beatrice. Have you not realized how inconsistent you are? Of course you’ve realized it, haven’t you? You’re a smart person.”

Beatrice: “Be silent, I suppose.”

Subaru: “No, I will not. Break the Contract? Sounds perfect. If you hate keeping the promise so much that you literally want to die, just stop. No one will fault you.”

Beatrice: “I will fault me! Why is it you don’t understand that, in fact!? Contracts are absolute, and keeping them is...”

Subaru: “Why don’t you understand it? If keeping the Contract kills you, you need to break the Contract and live. Is it really so strange that I’m opting for this?”

Subaru easily discarded these Contracts Beatrice was so fixated on. Beatrice had no words to his attitude. He might be looking like an incomprehensible, monstrous creature to her, right now.

Subaru found it far more mystifying that he was recipient to that opinion.

Keeping promises was important, of course.

Emilia had criticized him multiple times for breaking promises, and he had gone through multiple painful experiences exactly because he had broken them. Because of that, even Subaru knew that keeping promises was very important.

Even so, he felt no hesitation about making Beatrice break her Contract. And his reasoning was exactly what he had just told her. If anyone demanded that Beatrice keep the promise and die as a result, Subaru would flip the guy the bird and tell him— She would be made to violate the Contract, and Beatrice would surely live on.

He wouldn’t even think twice about doing it.

Beatrice: “Th—that is unrelenting, incorrigibly villainous of you, in fact...”

Subaru: “I know it’s unrelenting, and I am sorry for saying it. But it’s important. So I’m not surrendering this.”

Subaru’s stance had been decided from the very beginning. From the very beginning, the whole issue depended on Beatrice’s feelings.

Beatrice could not hide her panic and confusion at Subaru’s disparagement of Contracts. Of course she couldn’t. Contracts were that important for Spirits.

Having witnessed the relationship between a Spirit and a Spiritual Arts User, Subaru knew they were firm, weighty, utterly unshakable things. He knew, and yet he was saying it— You are more important than it.

Beatrice: “I—if, you... were That Person...”

Subaru's response to Contracts was overwhelmingly overwhelming. Frailty crept onto Beatrice's expression, bordering on breakdown.

Her lips spoke of the insubstantial someone that Beatrice had waited for over four centuries. The fictional entity that Echidna had so cruelly invented so that she could know who Beatrice would choose.

Beatrice wanted to be saved. The best proof was that Subaru's words had shaken her heart and brought her to tears.

Beatrice: "Will..."

Beatrice's teary eyes focused on Subaru. Her lips trembled, and, practically clinging—

Beatrice: "...you be Betty's That Person?"

This question could be the full stop on what had gone on for four centuries.

And it might be exactly what Echidna had ordered her, making it what the Witch wished to hear.

Who would Beatrice determine as being this insubstantial That Person?

The Witch had used her daughter to satisfy her own curiosity, letting her spend four-hundred years in solitude.

The payoff for all that time rested in that question.

Beatrice swallowed her breath. Subaru looked her in the eye, and declared.

Subaru: "Are you stupid? —Of course I wouldn't be this weird mysterious That Person of yours."

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After the ferocious shockwave gusted through the Library, Beatrice took the books thrown about by the wind and returned them to their bookcases. While they had fallen to the floor, none of the books looked like they had separated from their bindings, fortunately.

Beatrice reflected remorsefully on her use of force while inside the Library, relieved that only very minor damages had occurred to its books.

They were her comrades, who had passed four-hundred years of solitude alongside her.

Beatrice had not been lying about her wish to be a book. She had fantasized many times about being like these texts, something which could wait for such a long time without it rocking her heart at all. She now thought it hope borne from a stupid idea.

Beatrice: “Conceivably, it is laughable, I suppose.”

This was the wretchedness into which she had been cornered. She mocked herself for it. But inside her small chest, self-deprecation dimmed, replaced by wrath.

Beatrice: “That guy... that guy... truly, what is wrong with him, I suppose!”

Just thinking about him aggravated her, bringing her close to stomping the ground.

She would like to vent these pent-up emotions on something, but in this place which her Mother had instructed her to protect, everything was precious. Unable to find anything to take her tantrum out on, all Beatrice could do was to wait for her bloated emotions to wither.

She returned the final book to its shelf and sighed as she smoothed out her appearance. Then she sat herself back on the stepladder, reaching to cradle the black tome—and stopped.

He had said so easily, so many times, to simply throw it away.

Then, at the vital moment, he rejected the option which would have allowed Beatrice to discard the thing. Absolutely, entirely, so incomprehensible it infuriated her.

Beatrice: “I’m exhausted, in fact...”

But her fury would not last forever.

Beatrice stopped puffing out her cheeks, took that book she had hesitated to hold, and put it to her heart. Ultimately, to the end of the end, leaning on this thing was the only way to protect her mind. Just as Roswaal’s Gospel had writ, Beatrice’s end would arrive soon.

What emotion should she feel as she waited for it to come?

It was finally ending. Would that not be a good enough sentiment?

It was the one she was supposed to be feeling, but now that it was actually happening, she was confused.

—"You are stupid." For some reason those words remained, sitting heavily in her heart.

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Blown away by the shockwave, Subaru tumbled down the corridor until he slammed back-first into a wall. His side hit directly against a column, leading him to shriek and writhe.

Subaru: "Gah! Haa, gah... I—impossible! Halfway through the conversation, and that idiot just...!"

The door in front of him slammed shut. Subaru reached out for the door, his expression hateful, but naturally the sight before his eyes after cracking the thing open was not the Forbidden Library— merely a guest room.

Door Crossing had activated, and Subaru had been expelled from the Library.

Subaru: "I pissed her off so much she threw me out... Shit, messed up in choosing my words!"

What he had been trying to say was not incorrect, but there was a contradiction between how he was telling it and showing it. That resulted in Subaru being thrown out of the Library, and distanced from success.

Subaru: "Anyway, can't stay here. Have to find Beako through another door and...!"

???: "N—Natsuki-san?"

Subaru turned around, thinking to conquer the doors via utterly random selection, when a voice addressed him. Its familiarity, and the fact it was calling him, led Subaru to stumble and for his eyes to shoot open.

His gaze landed on Otto, peeking out from a neighboring room, who was supposed to be somewhere else. And peeking out from under Otto was Petra, also looking at Subaru.

Subaru: “Y—you guys? Why are you still in the mansion? I thought I told you that opening the doors of just one wing would be fine and to run away after?”

Otto: “Unfortunately, the situation outside has changed rather dramatically...”

Otto shook his head, his face pale as Subaru approached. It was inconceivable that Otto would be joking in this situation. Otto had aborted his escape, which meant something warranting that must be happening.

Subaru: “What happened? Short version please.”

Otto: “Witchbeasts did. Hordes of Witchbeasts are encircling the mansion, and we cannot move.”

Subaru: “Witchbeasts!?”

Subaru’s eyes shot open wide at the unexpected word and he looked to Petra for confirmation. She nodded several times in response.

Petra: “Erm, there’s lots of Witchbeasts different from those demon dogs... like snakes with two heads, or like opossums, lots of them.”

Subaru: “Do these guys live in the nearby forest?”

Petra: “They do, but the barrier should be keeping them out.”

Subaru: “The barrier again...”

During the previous Witchbeast debacle, they had confirmed that the barrier between Arlam Village and the woods surrounding the mansion had been repaired. Afterwards, they put top priority on looking out for weaknesses in the barrier, so it was inconceivable that a mistake could have happened after such a short timeframe.

And most importantly, the beasts were surrounding the mansion for some reason.

Subaru: “Is it like those mutts, something weird is happening to them? What about Arlam’s people? Are they okay?”

Otto: “I couldn’t locate any Witchbeasts when I instructed them to evacuate, and since they used the carriages from the Duchess to flee, they should be safe. Patrasche-chan is guiding them too.”

Subaru: “Okay. That’s a relief.”

The clever dragon was more trustworthy than some random guy, so she had been tasked with escorting them. While praying for Patrasche to pull it off, Subaru grit his teeth. The situation was unfolding down a track unknown to him yet again.

This Witchbeast attack had never happened before. Naturally, considering the timing, it had to be related to Elsa’s attack.

Subaru: “What about Frederica and Rem?”

Petra: “We haven’t run into Frederica-neesama or Rem-san... Erm, I—I don’t really think they can break through them and get away.”

Subaru: “Which means they are still in the mansion too. We’ll be thankful the beasts are still staying outside, but how much can Garfiel do?”

Subaru stroked Petra’s head, praising her strong heart for remaining composed during this extreme situation. If it were Subaru when he was her age, it wouldn’t be weird for him to piss himself crying. But circumstances prohibited them from staying still.

Subaru: “Where are we right now? Which wing of the mansion?”

Otto: “The eastern. Garfiel should still be battling in the western wing, so I suggest avoiding that area to circumvent damages...”

Subaru: “And so the possible escape routes are...”

Of course, Subaru needed to collect Beatrice, but Otto and Petra’s escape was also indispensable. Subaru descended into thought, scrutinizing his mental map of the mansion for any possible escape routes. However, a voice drowned out Subaru’s contemplations—

???: “—Oh my? You were all gathered here, waiting for me?”

A petrifying feeling, like a blade stroked against the back of their necks, made all of them freeze rigid.

Subaru promptly pulled Petra’s arm and hugged her close as he timidly glanced behind him.

Further down the hallway, lit with bars of moonlight, someone’s approaching footsteps echoed. Their shape soon entered recognizably into the light—

Subaru: “What the hell is Garfiel doing!?”

???: “I’ll unveil pretty guts from all three of you—”

Kicking off the floor before the shrieking Subaru, the Bowel Hunter’s black shadow darted as she drew closer.

Arc 4 Chapter 125A - The Roswaal Mansion Battle

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 15, Chapter 1 “The Final Day of Roswaal Manor”, Parts 4-5

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by SummaryAnon — [Complete](#), Page 153

???: “—DONAA!!”

The only one who managed to immediately react to the oncoming threat was Otto.

He held his hands out in front of him, influencing the world with a canto— the torrent of Mana broke through the mansion floor as a wall of earth surged up, blocking the whole of the wide hallway and obstructing the shadow’s advance. However—

Elsa: “Nuisance.”

Subaru: “In one hit!?”

One short statement, and two swings of a kukri.

The slash teared through the wall like paper, and with one kick to the bisected blockade, the whole thing crumbled instantly. Scattered particles of Mana alongside the collapsed wall’s remains. An archetypically sadistic smile alongside the silver gleam of a knife.

Elsa: “First in order is to slit your throats and silence you, or I suspect you won’t be cooperative.”

Subaru: “Stop saying this terrifying stuff!”

Using the momentary opening Otto created, Subaru held Petra close and tumbled into a neighboring room. Otto followed a second behind, shutting the door before immediately maneuvering behind the bed.

A slash cleaved through the door. The dangling lower portion of the door plummeted, having been kicked into the room.

Subaru: "Take this I guess!"

Elsa swooped into the room, for Subaru to attack her with a wooden clothes-hanger. She dodged by tilting backward and sliced the thing in two with a flourish of her blade, aiming for Subaru's throat with the backswing. But thanks to Petra jumping in and pushing Subaru out of the way, the contact ended with merely a graze.

Elsa: "Goodness. Bad girl."

Subaru: "She's our pride and a good girl, moron!"

Blood seeped from the shallow cut on Subaru's neck. He pressed down on the wound and pulled Petra close, retreating. A ghastly grin arose on Elsa's face as she prepared to pursue them. However,

Otto: "Then how about this!"

Otto tossed a spellstone, aiming for Elsa's face. The glowing red thing, packed with fire Mana, behaved much like a shotgun bullet. It was Otto's trump card, a stone even more pure than the one he had used against Garfiel.

Otto's hidden ace shot straight for the defenseless Elsa, and detonated. The magic ore burst apart in crimson halfway between Otto and Elsa.

Noise and light swept through the room, a heated wind fanning Subaru as he watched. His eyes focused so intensely that time felt to lag, Subaru saw how Elsa had not even bothered to turn around as she threw her knife and cleaved Otto's spell stone.

The stone detonated at an unintended point in space, burning Otto's eyes. He screamed as he pitched back.

Elsa drove her foot into Otto's exposed stomach, shooting him away to crash into a wall. She did not even glance at Otto, collapsed, as she instead turned toward Subaru, who swallowed his breath. Elsa's brows hitched up.

Elsa: “Oh? You’re... I think I know you from the Capital.”

Subaru: “I—I’m honored you remember me. Considering that relationship, would you mind overlooking us?”

Elsa: “I make a point to, no matter how long it takes, witness any guts I previously failed to behold.”

Subaru: “She’s a collector!”

Subaru could feel Petra clutch tighter at his sleeve. His thoughts blazed white.

He keenly sensed that his Gate was dead. He could pray or set his soul ablaze, but neither his Mana nor his Gate were giving the slightest murmur of response. It was impossible for him to use Shamac here, and more importantly it would amount to folly if he ended up immobilizing himself again.

Which leaves him with only one method— Invisible Providence.

Subaru: “———”

The instant he decided to use it, a dark, alien thing slithered through Subaru’s body. It had been still, but began asserting its presence the moment it realized that Subaru was calling upon it, eager to display its power and cheering.

A foreboding feeling struck him, as if he was feeding a repugnant monster.

While consciously ignoring the feeling, Subaru issued orders to the dark power shrieking its birthing cry, determined to cut open a pathway from his inside to the outside.

He could cry blood with the agony, and he was aversive to using this power. Regardless, he had to cling onto what he can, utilize what he can, and live while capitalizing on whatever he can.

All to save everyone he wished to be saved.

Elsa: “Ahh... What a thrilling expression you have.”

Subaru: “I’ll show you something better.”

Elsa: “I’m so excited——”

Taking aim at Elsa's core as she brandished her two blades, Subaru pulled the trigger. Now he just needed to release, and her slender form would be shredded, mauled and perforated.

Subaru: "—Oooh!"

A squirming thing flows into his bloodstream, courses through his whole.

It almost feels like the air he breathes is chromatic, like he is cloaked in blazing heat, as the dark alien nails extend, Elsa's bisection conceivable and anticipated.

Just like this, offer up everything, and—

Petra: "Subaru!"

A grieving cry, and the dull pain of a pinch at his side.

Subaru scrunched his face in surprise, the repugnant emotions inside him dispersing immediately. What remained were the faint dregs of a dark taint, and the unchanged emanations of black murder.

Elsa had begun swooping near, and Subaru would be delayed in managing to fix his aim in a panic—when,

Elsa: "—Close."

Subaru: "—Evaded!?"

It took Elsa a microsecond to discover the gust closing in from behind and dodge it. She aborted her attack on Subaru and twisted away, dancing out from under the claws which gouged her back.

Flipping backwards, she drove a kick into Frederica's flank and rode the momentum to jab her elbow into Subaru, sending both of them flying as she somersaulted backwards—escaping from between them to calmly land on the room's bed.

Elsa put her hand to her back, looking at the blood on her palm. She looked to be in ecstasy. She then looked at Frederica, kneeling on the floor, and tilts her head cheerfully.

Elsa: "Yet another... no, two more people to receive me. Truly a wonderful mansion."

Frederica: “That ambush did not even work... those are not the reflexes of a human.”

Frederica groaned in frustration, unable to hide her shivering. The blow to his chest caused Subaru to cough as he crawled over to Frederica.

Subaru: “Frederica, my bad, thank you. And, Petra too.”

After addressing Frederica, Subaru thanked Petra, her hand in his. Petra shook her head, her eyes teary.

Petra: “N—no, I’m who should apologize. But, Subaru... Your eyes looked so scary, and...”

Subaru: “Honestly, I think I was on the border of getting swallowed. That could have turned bad if I wasn’t pulled out of it. Guess I can’t be careless about using Invisible Providence...”

Petra: “Invisi-what?”

His ace being a double-edged sword was something not even worthy of surprise to Subaru. The problem here was how its uses were now limited further. All he could do was pray that this current backfire had resulted from using it in quick succession.

At the very least, he anticipated that he could not count on Invisible Providence for this fight. It would mean losing far too much in exchange.

Petra: “Frederica-neesama...”

Frederica: “It must have been frightening for you, Petra. You did well to not cry.”

Petra still clutched Subaru’s sleeve when Frederica called her. Frederica appraised her precious faux-sister’s efforts while turning to face Subaru, her expression stern.

Frederica: “Subaru-sama, my apologies. I recognize you wished that I take Rem-sama and flee the mansion... I’ve failed my task.”

Subaru: “No, it cannot be helped in this situation. And the outside’s even more dangerous than here... Where’s Rem?”

Frederica: “Here.”

Frederica held nothing in her hands, both equipped with clawed cestus.

Subaru was anxious about Rem's apparent absence, when Frederica turned her back to face him. Firmly secured there with ropes, carried on Frederica's back, was Rem. She was bound securely, but it was nonetheless quite the overwhelmingly surreal scene.

Subaru: "I know we're in an emergency, but it looks like Rem's neck will snap if she's moved around too much! It's terrifying!"

Frederica: "Fortunately, albeit a word I'd hesitate to use, Rem-sama has been separated from the regular flow of time. Because of that, even if you treated her somewhat roughly there would be no effect..."

Subaru: "E—even so, try to treat her carefully as possible okay?"

That was the result of Frederica striving to do the best she could. Subaru did not want to complain about it as he did not have any alternative plans to offer. He would have to have Rem endure through an uncomfortable experience for a little while.

But either way—

Subaru: "None of us can fight except Frederica. Me and Petra are no fighting force. Rem's asleep. Otto fought his best, but for all his struggle he fruitlessly wound up..."

Otto: "Except I'm not dead!? Could you please not spin these terrifying tales while people are dizzied from hitting their head!?"

Subaru looked down solemnly, which resuscitated Otto, lying on the floor in a corner of the room. He shook his head and crawled over to the group, trembling at the bisected door and clothes-hanger.

Otto: "Who would've thought that the magic ore would be shot down like that... It worked fine on Garfiel."

Subaru: "They've got different experience when it comes to fighting, and their brains are probably built different. Don't compare them, it's sad."

Frederica: "Garf... Then he truly has been raised in the manner which he appears to have been. I was not watching over him..."

Subaru put a stop to Otto's cruel comparisons. It seemed like even Frederica had some thoughts about Garfiel after their ten-year reunion. She might feel guilty that her eyes strayed from him and he had grown up into a sort of a punk.

But all that business and their fostering of brother-sister relations would need to be left as something to do later.

Subaru: "Gotta do something to solve the problems at hand."

Elsa: "Can I assume that you're about done with your pleasant chat?"

Subaru: "Sorry for making you wait. And how about you? Are you mentally ready for a five-versus-one beatdown?"

Elsa: "I'm afraid you're including three, or perhaps four stray children in your calculations?"

Elsa smiled faintly as she accurately counted the number of non-combatants. The kukri knives in each of Elsa's hands swayed as she easily hopped off the bed. Watching this, Subaru realized—

—No blood was dripping from Elsa's back anymore.

Subaru: "But it looked like it was pretty deep?"

Elsa: "You mean my wound? Don't worry, it's fine. Look at it."

With that, Elsa turned on the spot. And just like Subaru had suspected, the wound Frederica inflicted on Elsa's back was perfectly gone. The slashes still remained on her clothes, so it was not like it had been just imagination.

Everyone, including Frederica and except Subaru, swallowed their breath, faces tense. Conversely, Subaru just gave a deep sigh and cursed his bad premonition for being correct.

Subaru: "I mean I knew killing you won't make you stay dead... But are you kidding, your wounds heal too? You're basically just a monster."

Elsa: "I don't remember ever discarding my humanity, and I have some disagreements about you saying that to a woman. Besides that, where could you have learned about my constitution?"

Subaru: “Anyone would think something was up the second you weren’t split in two by Reinhard.”

Elsa: “I don’t go through experiences like that one often. I nearly got split in half— I wonder what a hero’s guts are like. It’s extremely fascinating.”

Although having borne witness to such incredible combat strength, it did not seem Elsa had learned her lesson. It would be fine if she went and got attached to Reinhard, who felt like he wouldn’t die even if you killed him, so why was she so focused on constantly causing problems for Subaru and the others?

He had too many bitter complaints and grievances with Roswaal than he could ever hope to voice.

Frederica: “Subaru-sama... If she’s present here, that means... Garf is...?”

Asked Frederica timidly, her expression stiff. Having witnessed the abnormality of Elsa’s constitution, she was anxious about her brother’s absence. But Subaru had no answer which could dispel Frederica’s unease. If there was anything he could tell her—

Subaru: “Unfortunately, I can’t explain why she’s here either. But I seriously doubt Garfiel was beaten in such a short timeframe.”

Frederica: “From what I witnessed, their strength seemed to be level... Garf even looked like he had slight advantage.”

Subaru: “That’s how I see it too, but in the end we don’t...”

“...know”, Subaru meant to say as he glanced toward Elsa, when his breathing froze. Following Subaru’s gaze, Frederica looked over there as well and held her breath as well. Elsa’s brows furrowed, perplexed, as she also looked at that same spot above her head.

It looked like the room’s ceiling is sinking in, falling, and—

Garf: “The fuckin’ cheek!!”

???: “Ee, eep!?”

Subaru: “That moron!!”

The instant they heard the ceiling breaking, Subaru and the others rushed to the door.

Right after the five of them ran out the door, the ceiling collapsed to crush the entirety of that room, furniture groaning and wood snapping apart thunderously. The explosive noise and the gale gusted out the room, the aftermath of the destruction flowing down the corridor.

Up billowed plumes of white smoke. Subaru spat the gritty dust from his mouth as he tumbled down the hallway to escape the scene. It seemed everyone had managed to avoid getting caught in the collapse.

And from beyond the smoke—

???: “Don’t’cha pull none of that stupid crap! Now ahead we go!”

A familiar, uncouth voice shouted with fervor. The battering of metal on metal and the noise of a blow followed the voice, until a silhouette cut through the smoke and tumbled into the hallway.

Subaru: “Uh, wha—!?”

Seeing that tumbling silhouette, Subaru found himself yelping in surprise.

Well, of course. This figure was not the one he anticipated, and was instead a clawed furry quadrupedal beast with spotty fur— Looking much like a hyena.

But it was not the size of a hyena. It was huge, twice as big as Subaru.

Subaru did shudder for a moment at the arrival of the giant beast, but immediately noticed that the hyena’s eyes were devoid of life, the animal dead. He found that its neck bones were broken, possibly bent into angles opposite of what should be the norm.

Something possessing incredible power had obviously snapped the thing’s neck.

And if there was anyone in the mansion who could probably do that to the beast, it’d be—

Garfiel: “Hey, Captain. Th’hell, ya were still inside?”

—Garfiel, who kicked the smoke away and appeared in the hall, cool as a cucumber. He noticed Subaru and the others staring in astonishment at the dead hyena, and chortled.

Garfiel: “Ya don’t need to freak out, tis all good. My amazin’ self killed it.”

Subaru: “Right, thank you... Not! You stopped paying attention to her! I thought I was gonna die! I was terrified! I thought I was dead!”

Garfiel: “Yeah, yeah, my bad, but my amazin’ self wasn’t thinkin’ to let her go for an instant. She ran off while I was tangled up with that pest.”

Subaru: “Pest which means?”

Garfiel’s face twisted bitterly as he clicked his fangs.

This pest he was talking about was probably this hyena. Going off the previous conversation, it definitely had to be some kind of Witchbeast. But that was when—

???: “Geez! I can’t believe this! Elsa! Elsa! Dooo somethingggg!”

Elsa: “I’d love to, but I’m sure you’re the one who said, «leave this to me, go do something about the others». Though I’m happy to have more bellies to gut.”

Two female voices, one loud, one calm.

Instantly, the room that Garfiel had crushed was crushed once again, and again silhouettes cut through the smoke to appear in the corridor.

Weighty footsteps, and light footsteps— with a size disparity so large you’d hesitate to call them only two pairs.

Otto: “...What is that thing?”

Unable to keep silent any longer, Otto pointed at it and asked Subaru for an answer. Subaru felt the cold, damp sweat oozing down his body.

Subaru: “From what I’m seeing, a biggish hippo.”

Otto: “Just biggish?”

Subaru: “Yeah. Because hippos are big anyway.”



Illustration from Volume 15, coloring by Setowi ([source](#))

If you took a hippo and tripled its size, it would perhaps manage to become this creature. Black flesh, with a thick rocky hide. Its round eyes hosted a red gleam, wicked and hostile. Its mouth was so large that it could probably eat Old Man Rom in one bite, with flat teeth like mortar stones. It resembled a hippo at a glance, and it was probably what a person would end up with if a hippo's wickedness and ferocity were to be tripled.

???: "Spotty Rex's deadd! He's deeeaaadd! Poor boy! It's awfuulll! Awfuulll!"

High-pitched sobs wailed out from atop the giant hippo in mourning of the hyena's death. The person riding the hippo, legs flailing everywhere, was a small girl. Her brown hair dressed in a braid, and her features were rustically simple.

Her face was familiar to Subaru.

Subaru: "...The forest, the Witchbeasts."

Back when Subaru had been caught up in the loop series at the mansion. When Subaru had gone into the deepest reaches of the forest to save the children from Arlam Village, he had found her. She had been the main reason as to why the children were lured into entering the forest.

Subaru had heard from Roswaal that she had vanished after the whole affair was over, but—

Petra: "She's from back then!"

It seemed that Petra had reached the same conclusion. Had Subaru been the only one to notice it, then he would probably have discarded it as some kind of misunderstanding on his part. But if Petra's memories were telling her the same thing, he had to accept it.

This girl had been involved in the Witchbeast debacle.

And if the current situation with Witchbeasts surrounding the mansion was considered, that meant even that debacle—

Subaru: "Roswaal's plans...!"

She was working with Elsa. So, was Roswaal behind the Witchbeast affair too?

If so, that meant the events in the Capital, the events in the mansion, Roswaal's hands had been behind everything. All of Subaru's efforts had been in accord with a future dictated by a dark book of prophecies.

Subaru: "Like I can accept something so stupid!"

Fixed fate was something that he could not accept. At very least, it would start changing from now on. All it meant was that the Witchbeast debacle would be put aside as another thing to interrogate Roswaal about, and that he had yet another reason to smack that clown in the face.

Subaru blazed with rage and rebellion. The girl atop the hippo finally noticed his gaze, blinking her round eyes and waving at Subaru.

Girl: "Oh, you're the guy from before. And Petra-chan's here too. It's been aaageeees."

Subaru: "Y—you sure aren't shy about talking. You do realize what this situation is?"

Subaru could not hide how the girl's unconcerned attitude caught him off-guard.

She tilted her head at Subaru's blatant caution.

Girl: "I realize, I'm woorkiiing. Mama will scold me if I don't do my job. But then Elsa's there, off doing whatever she wants."

Elsa: "Taking the rear post is tediously boring, it was a mistake to appoint me there. My methods are far more vivid and fresh for enjoying life, compared to being made animal feed. Being killed by me is the better choice for the victim too, correct?"

Elsa started walking over to the hippo's side as she directed the conversation onto Subaru. Subaru sighed, then raises his finger.

Subaru: "Okay, then I'll give you the coolest proposition ever. You take that knife you're holding and flip it around. And then you plunge the thing into your stomach. After that you roll and roll around on the floor. Guts everywhere, I'm happy, you're happy. It's the *seppuku*¹⁸¹ challenge. Isn't it cool?"

¹⁸¹ You probably know what it's referencing, but... Suicide by disembowelment (more information [here](#)).



Illustration from Volume 12, coloring by Setowi ([source](#))

Girl: “Pff! Ahahahaha! That’s awesome! Come on, Elsa, wanna try it? Elsa, you like guts. It’ll be fun! I’m excited!”

Elsa: “Sorry, but I’ve already done that so many times after getting this constitution that I’m bored of it.”

After learning that his super cool proposition had already been put into practice for real, a super cool shudder rushed down Subaru’s spine. Regardless, it did not change the fact they have two predicaments sitting in front of them.

Subaru: “I don’t know how it works, but is it safe for me to think she’s controlling the Witchbeasts?”

Garfiel: “Doubt yer wrong. It’s the same for the ones outside, ‘n the same for that mutt, all of them are doin’ whatever she says, no fuss at all— What’s the plan, Captain?”

Honestly, the situation had changed immensely from the initial plan. Not only Elsa, but they had another foe— someone who commanded massive Witchbeasts.

So long as beasts lurked outside, it was going to be nearly impossible to escape the mansion peacefully. And most importantly, Subaru’s team had not yet assembled all the people they needed to save.

Even if they took Frederica, Petra, and Rem to the village, it was not enough.

Subaru: “Garfiel... can I ask you to do something crazy?”

Garfiel: “Try me, Captain.”

Subaru: “I want you to stall Elsa and the girl simultaneously.”

Garfiel: “———”

Subaru knew that he was asking for something unreasonable. Just Elsa alone was a foe who presented unparalleled difficulty. While Garfiel was keeping her in line, he would also need to keep the attention of the massive Witchbeast.

Subaru had, since coming to this world, learned the threat Witchbeasts posed to a painful extent. And so—

Garfiel: “No problem. Just leave it to me. Now I’m motivated.”

Subaru: “—!? S-seriously? No kidding? You can do it?”

Garfiel: “It’s what I’m here for. Been talkin’ some massive talk. Too late for me to start whinin’ over the enemies bein’ strong or havin’ numbers. «Meedan who shoulders the mountain loses anywhere to run», like they say.”

With that, Garfiel clattered his shields together.

Even Subaru could tell it was bravado, completely unsupported by any real self-confidence. Regardless, Garfiel was the only one he could rely on for this.

Subaru: “Garfiel. I know I already said this countless times in the carriage, but...”

Garfiel: “I hear ya. My amazin’ self got no ideas of dyin’ in this place either.”

Garfiel interrupted Subaru and eased his worries by pushing him forward with his shoulder. He was indicating that there was no need to say anything else. Repeating it would be inconsiderate toward Garfiel’s resolve. So Subaru swallowed his words and returned a push to Garfiel’s shoulder.

By that alone, he pressed a firm form of trust on Garfiel.

Garfiel: “Now get goin’. I ain’t able to get serious if yer gettin’ in the way.”

Garfiel bared his fangs as he spoke to the others. Hearing that, Otto, Petra, and Frederica looked at each other.

Otto: “Garfiel, don’t die. I don’t want to run around cleaning Natsuki-san’s messes by myself.”

Frederica: “We truly have not spoken enough. But very well. We’ll speak another time, with Grandmother alongside us.”

Petra: “Y—you can do it, scary-looking man.”

Garfiel smiled wryly while nodding to the three.

Subaru felt like they had just loaded a pile of death flags on him. But with how huge the pile actually was, it would flip into a comforting life flag. That was how Subaru rationalized things in a bid to cling to hope.

Garfiel: “N’ so, yer opponent from now on’s my amazin’ self. This time I ain’t gettin’ distracted and I ain’t lettin’ yer flirt around. My claws ‘n fangs ‘n shields are gonna beat ya ‘til you cry!”

As he sharply turned around, Garfiel roared. Bathed directly in his aggression, Elsa smiled while the girl’s mount let out a bass growl.

Elsa: “Meili. Don’t interfere this time.”

Meili: “But you’re the one interfering, Elsa! I’m just doing what Mama saaaaiid tooo!”

While having their disagreement, Elsa and the girl attacked Garfiel. He braced himself as he caught the heavy blow on one shield and the sharp blow on the other, sparks flying as Subaru ran away as fast as he could.

Subaru: “Otto! Frederica! Situation’s changed! Since we can’t leave the mansion through anywhere decent, we’ll escape from a different route so we don’t get eaten by Witchbeasts!”

Otto: “You say «a different route», but I’m sure we’ll be faced with the same outcome even if we take a backdoor. If Garfiel can’t support us in combat, what should we do?”

Subaru: “What if you do frantically negotiate with Witchbeasts using your Divine Protection of the Soul of Language, and depending how the bargaining goes they surrender the path and we escape? Here’s your chance to be the lead role.”

Otto: “Witchbeasts generally just say «Me eat you whole», so it isn’t really a conversation!”

It was a faint hope to begin with, and Otto looked miserable as he replied, running alongside Subaru.

Yes, there were people who you could speak with, but not communicate with. It seems that principle worked for both humans and animals. Elsa was good proof of that. Which meant there was only one escape path Subaru could think of—

Frederica: “Subaru-sama. I have an idea for an escape route.”

Subaru: “I know, Frederica. It’s probably the same place I’m gonna suggest. But...”

There was a problem with that route. Just as Subaru goes to point out what the problem was, he dashed out the hallway and swallowed his breath.

Subaru: “No matter where we run, they just can’t make it easy for us, fuck!”

—Before them, two hyenas noticed their presence and rushed to attack.

Though the cast of the Roswaal Mansion Battle had changed, the fight remained heated.



Arc 4 Chapter 126A - Attack of Guiltlaw, Ebony King of the Woodlands!

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 15, Chapter 3 “—Giltirau, Black King of the Forest, Strikes!!”,
Parts 1-3

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by SummaryAnon — [Complete](#), Page 165

—Sparks of steel on steel shrieked and shrieked in succession.

Garfiel: “Ghaaaaaaaah!”

Elsa: “Ahahaha! Wonderful, wonderful, wonderful!”

Her body danced through the air. Her blades elected for no fixed course as they slashed for Garfiel’s vitals.

Who was to say how she was capable of these moves? Every single casual-looking strike closed in with deadly force and accuracy to imminently gouge into Garfiel. Her crooked blade shredded the air, transcending sound as it flew at sonic speed.

Garfiel redirected the blow upwards with his shields, defending himself by letting the strike slide away rather than block it directly.

The force of the woman’s slash remained lethal as she shifted only the trajectory of her swing, her body flowing aside with skill. Cutting into that opening, Garfiel aimed at the woman’s open stomach and swung his leg.

Garfiel’s kick was as mighty as a cannonball, easily capable of demolishing walls of stone. If it hit someone at full force, their fleshy human body would offer absolutely no defense, as its overwhelming strength would mean their innards would be destroyed.

And Garfiel had, in fact, succeeded in landing such blows to pulverize the woman's flesh and bone, more than a couple times until now. However—

Elsa: "I've seen this before."

Garfiel: "Buzz off!!"

The woman twisted her open side, backing away from the kick's trajectory. Garfiel's foot merely grazed across the woman's back, before getting tangled in her black cloak.

It was an instantaneous, but conceivably fatal moment of lag for both the woman and Garfiel.

Elsa: "Haa—"

With a quick exhale, the woman reached her arm around to her back, entangling the cape further over Garfiel's legs. Elsa was halfway through a backflip. Her other hand darted up from behind, racing for Garfiel. The swing would slice Garfiel's right thigh in two— before he even considered his options, he hopped with his free left foot and jabbed it directly beneath his entangled right.

Garfiel's left foot slammed into the flat of the ascending blade.

Metal and wrist snapped as the woman cried out sensually, dropping her knife. She retreated, but since his leg remained entangled, he fell back to the floor, unable to pursue her. He used the momentum from his kick and put his hands to the ground to backflip away, opening distance between them before disentangling his foot.

Garfiel: "Got yer wrist 'n yer knife, haha."

Elsa: "That is fine. I have spare knives, and my hand will be moving again before long. And my cloak... It's practically just an impairment while fighting you."

Garfiel: "Ya can keep yer bravado to yerself."

Elsa: "We'll check your guts to see whether this is bravado."

Garfiel used the stolen cloak to wipe off his sweat and dumped it on the side of the hallway.

Elsa paid no mind to her cloak as she touched her crooked left hand with her right oh so tenderly, and called out to the massive silhouette behind her.

Elsa: “Meili. Don’t just watch, give me another knife.”

Meili: “Geez, just doing whatever you want, Elsa. I’m not your luggage girl or knife caddie. And you keep fighting so Rockpiggie can’t cut in.”

The girl riding the massive Witchbeast puffed out her cheeks in reply as she flung something to Elsa. It was a holder for Elsa’s customary knives. She drew two fresh kukri out of it, holding both of them in one hand as she tested their grip, looking up at the girl.

Elsa: “It’s a blight on your own cuteness that you brought that giant Witchbeast along. Though I’m glad to dance with him without any nuisances involving themselves.”

Meili: “But it’s gonna be ridiculous if you get caught up in that and let the mark get away. If Mama knew what you did, she’d totally scold you. I’m gonna tell her you were naaaughtyyyy, Elsa.”

Elsa: “If I feared being scolded, then I wouldn’t start without you or steal your food. You and the others should be the good children. I personally don’t mind being troublesome.”

As she spoke, Elsa tossed the two knives in the air and started juggling them one-handed. The size and speed of the blades as they spun meant that Elsa could lose an arm if she made a mistake, but Elsa’s risky maneuvers ended with one knife in her right hand, and one knife in her left.

Elsa: “My apologies for making you wait. It seemed like waiting would be enough to fix my hand.”

Garfiel: “Don’t worry yerself ‘bout it. My amazin’ self’s also lookin’ to buy time, and I ain’t insensitive enough to butt into a talk b’tween sisters. Family talks are damn important.”

Elsa: “Goodness. Why do you believe that she and I are sisters?”

Garfiel: “‘Cause ya keep callin’ the same lady yer mom. It doesn’t matter that yer hair ‘n eye colors are different. I’m talkin’bout bein’ family, yer blood ain’t got anythin’ to do wit’it.”

Hearing Garfiel’s reasoning, Elsa’s eyes shot open for a second in surprise. She put her hand to her mouth, and out slipped a very cheery laugh.

Garfiel: “Eh?”

Elsa: “Huhu... Ah, no, forgive me. I wasn’t expecting that response, so I found it a little bit funny. You truly do seem like a good boy.”

Garfiel: “Stop treatin’ me like a kid. My amazin’ self’s an amazin’ man.”

Elsa: “Indeed? Although, it doesn’t feel to me that you’re fully a man or an adult.”

Elsa replied to the dissatisfied Garfiel with her cheeks still relaxed. Garfiel’s brows furrowed in puzzlement, making Elsa’s smile even more cheerful.

Meili: “Elsa, Elsa. Don’t you get the feeling this scary-looking guy’s actually reeeeeeallyyyy precious?”

Elsa: “Yes, Meili. I am just beginning to get that feeling. For the first time in a long while, I may have sighted somebody who I’d rather keep alive after pulling out their guts.”

Garfiel: “Stop runnin’ yer damn mouths. Yer both gonna be takin’ a nap after eatin’ my amazin’ fists.”

Garfiel sharply turned his wrists as he spoke. He really did not understand Elsa and Meili’s conversation, but he could definitely tell they were mocking his determination.

Should Garfiel understand that, then he would have no kind words to offer. Unless they apologized in tears as they begged for forgiveness, Garfiel would pulverize them immobile, and dish out due punishment— Such was Garfiel’s duty.

Garfiel: “Get on wit’it already. Yer buyin’ even more time for the Captain ’n th’others to get away. And my amazin’ self ain’t hopin’ to be gettin’ a gold star for runnin’ away. I’m beatin’ ya to yer last inch, and teachin’ ya a lesson. That my amazin’ self’s the strongest shield, inside or outside Sanctuary.”

With that, Garfiel battered his shields together.

A high-pitched sound rang down the hallway as Garfiel lobbed his determination at the two enemies in the moonlit corridor.

Meili: “—Pffhahaa! Elsa, did you hear that? He’s the strongest shield! Strongest shield. Pff— Pffhaha! He reeeeeeallyyyy is precious!”

However, the situation ended up being that Meili, of all things, laughed, and Elsa's smile also intensified. They did not seem to be feeling threatened.

Garfiel: "Fuck you laughin' at, huh?"

Meili: "Ahhhh, it's so funny. So funny I just laugh. You're funny too with how you think you're oh so strong, but the group that ran away are also just so, so funny."

Garfiel: "The Captain's group's funny?"

Meili: "They are. Aren't they? My pets are surrounding the mansion, so there's only one place to go to escape. That's actually meant to be Elsa's post, but since she went off acting on her own, I put a replacement there."

Elsa: "——"

Meili shot Elsa a criticizing gaze, to which the unabashedly paid no heed. Elsa's murderous eyes stared at Garfiel, observing his every action, making it extraordinarily difficult for him to move. And he also needed to devote some attention to Meili's comment.

Meili thumped the back of the Witchbeast she was riding on, as Garfiel's gaze grew sharper.

Meili: "Except for Rockpiggie, I brought one more huge pet with me today. That child is the one blocking the path. So while you're thinking you're buying time, you're actually doing the opposite of what you want."

Garfiel: "..."

Meili: "When you're done with me and Elsa, you're going to catch up to the others and save them. That's what you're thinking. But that's really not happening. So I'm seeing you doing your best to buy time without even realizing this, and everything's just so funny."

Unable to keep herself from smiling, Meili laughed at Garfiel's silliness. Faced with her juvenile malice, Garfiel sighed deeply. Indeed, there were many unstable requirements piling up on them. Meili was correct, they were definitely facing a situation which exceeded their plans. However—

Garfiel: "Ha. Stupid bullshit."

Meili: "...Huh?"

Garfiel: "Yer th'ones who ain't gettin' it. You got more monsters around? We're th'ones gettin' pinned? As if me or the Captain'd let that fly."

Enjoying the way Meili's smile had disappeared, Garfiel stepped forwards. He watched as Elsa reacted, stooping herself slightly forward—

Garfiel: "The Captain 'n the others beat the shit outta me— They're gonna snort laughin' so hard they blast yer dumb obstacle right outta here!"

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Subaru: "We're doomed we're doomed we're doomed we're doomed we're doomed we're doomed, what is even going on!?"

Utterly out of breath, Subaru whined as he dumped himself to the floor. On the third floor of Roswaal mansion's main wing, on the platform leading to the staircase to the top floor, Subaru's group was assembled— Subaru, Otto, Frederica, Petra, and Rem, all holding their breath.

The fatigue was blatant on all of them as they sat there, somewhat deep wounds present on the whole party. In particular—

Subaru: "Are you alright, Frederica?"

Frederica: "...I am, this is merely trivial, it is not anything serious. Subaru-sama, I apologize to you for demonstrating such fecklessness."

Subaru: "We wouldn't get anywhere without you. The pathetic ones here are us guys, me and Otto. I'm sorry. We're weak."

Otto: "T—this time alone... I cannot refute your banter, Natsuki-san."

Otto sighed in frustration. Subaru spat the blood out from his mouth.

While ignoring the hideous pain across his whole body, Subaru readjusted Rem's position on his back. He had switched roles with Frederica, now being tasked with carrying Rem. Otto guided Petra by the hand while Subaru shouldered Rem. Their only fighter, Frederica, stood at the frontlines while opening a path. Such had been the optimal plan for these five.

Right after parting with Garfiel, Subaru's group had been attacked by two hyena Witchbeasts. Between Otto's spellstones and Frederica's fighting, they had barely managed to repel the hyenas, but they soon discovered many more Witchbeasts placed throughout the mansion to torment them.

The hordes of bat-like, Blackwinged Mice lurking in the hallway between the main and separate wing. The hyena-like, Spotted Rex wandering throughout the mansion, attacking whenever they could. Opossums¹⁸² that cast nets over the team after they entered a room, and swooped down the second they let their guard down.

They had had a particularly painful battle when dealing with a two-headed snake¹⁸³, its body as thick as Subaru's arm.

They had managed to drive the Blackwinged Mice away with smoke, Frederica's claws had bested the Rex, they had fled from the Banassi while having their rear ends chewed, Otto's frantic negotiations had managed to stall the Abonsconda, and Subaru had taken the opening to grapple the thing and have Frederica decapitate it— and now, they had arrived at this juncture.

Subaru: "We're just, completely... We failed because we had to split up with Garfiel..."

Otto: "Don't be so faint of heart. Now should be around the time Garfiel would be confidently shouting that we'll succeed, so let's hold expectations at least equivalent to the ones that he's placed on us."

Subaru: "With how dutiful you are, you really don't feel suited to being a merchant..."

Otto was looking the least dire of all of them stamina-wise. Subaru gave him a wry smile, psyching himself up, and got to his feet.

¹⁸² In Ask.fm, Tappei gave a Furigana reading for this Witchbeast (バーナッシュ), whose romanization is Banassi. Source is [here](#). The literal translation of the Witchbeast's name is Opossum, or Bag Mouse, which is used to refer to marsupials in real life (袋鼠).

¹⁸³ In Ask.fm, Tappei gave a Furigana reading for this Witchbeast (アボンスコンダ), whose romanization is Abonsconda. Source is [here](#). The literal translation of the Witchbeast's name is Two-Headed Snake (双頭蛇).

The Rem on his back was, honestly, so light it saddened him. Subaru had heard that unconscious or sleeping people were heavy to shoulder, but Rem alone was not exhibiting that.

He could barely feel her weight or her warmth. Her very presence was dim. Her faint heartbeat and breathing alone proved that she was alive as Subaru firmly corrected her position, as if he was terrified that, even though it would surely not happen, he would drop her and not notice.

Petra: “Frederica-neesama...”

Frederica: “Do not worry, Petra. There is no need to look so anxious... We will reach our destination very shortly.”

Frederica responded to Petra’s nervous gaze with a hearty smile. But Frederica’s situation was not as optimistic as she was making it out to be. A hyena had mauled her arm during a fight, she was unable to lift her bleeding left arm, and her movements lacked their usual refinement. They could not place hope in her to fight at full strength, and needed to find a place to heal and rest immediately.

Subaru: “Though yeah, we really are close to our destination.”

Subaru muttered as he looked up the staircase— at the uppermost floor.

Their team was trying to reach Roswaal’s office. That meant they were aiming for the escape route leading outside located there, but it was also the bad road that had led to Elsa’s invasion in all the previous loops.

When Subaru had first lost his plan to flee to the outside of the mansion, he had bordered on discarding this route as well— But after a conversation with Frederica, changed his mind.

It happened right after they left Garfiel and repelled the two hyenas.

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Frederica: “There is a concealed passage in the Master’s office which leads to the outside. We may capably escape the mansion and flee to a cabin in the forest using it. Should we do that...”

Subaru: “Sorry, Frederica. It’s not gonna be that easy. There are reserves awaiting us in the hidden passage. Since that’s the path that woman got in here through.”

Frederica: “———”

Aware that the situation was nigh hopeless, Subaru nonetheless reported this information to Frederica, who was listening quietly.

Subaru had run into Elsa before while trying to check the hidden passage. Leaving aside whether she had entered through the passage this loop, at the very least she knew of its existence.

Subaru: “Going off what Elsa and that girl said... It sounds like they have other allies. Leaving aside whether this «mama» is actually their mother, considering how they look nothing alike... If they’re going to have a rear guard in place, then they’re going to post someone at that passage.”

It was natural to believe that it would be blocked. Witchbeasts were surrounding the mansion, and there was an enemy in the escape route too. They were utterly trapped, and Subaru forced his brain to fire.

Things were desperate. It was a pity that they could not use Beatrice’s help, in a situation with their escape route ineffective. They would not need to agonize about this had Subaru succeeded in convincing Beatrice. With her Door Crossing, escaping this place would be so simple they wouldn’t even need to think about it.

Subaru: “...I’m so selfish.”

Subaru knew about Beatrice’s anguish and the reason behind it, and yet he still tried to cling to her aid. He could not get her help because he had failed to bring her outside, proving that he wasn’t looking at her properly.

It was only natural that she hate and eject him from the room.

Otto: “Natsuki-san.”

Petra: “Subaru.”

Perhaps noticing something about Subaru’s expression as he sank into self-loathing, a tap came to his shoulder and a tug came to his arm.

He looked to find the tap came from Otto on his right, and the tug came from Petra on his left. Each one of the pair had used their methods to have Subaru snap back to reality. Realizing they had done the same thing, both scrunched up their faces.

Looking at the two of them, Subaru sighed, feeling saved.

Frederica: "Subaru-sama. I believe that we ought to choose that path nonetheless."

Subaru raised his head. Frederica raised her finger.

Frederica: "As you have stated, it presently appears that we are trapped in a deadlock. Ferocious Witchbeasts are encircling the mansion, and the enemy is aware of our single route of escape. Normally this would mean that we would inevitably be killed..."

Subaru: "Yes, right. I think the same, so I've been wondering about whether we could at least find a weak spot in the siege of Witchbeasts, but..."

Frederica: "Incidentally, Subaru-sama. Where have you previously met that assailant woman?"

Interrupted by Frederica's low-voiced question, Subaru quietly held his breath. Unable to read her intentions in asking it, Subaru nodded with a "Yeah".

Subaru: "She targeted Emilia in the Capital before. The Sword Saint just happened to show up there and because of that everyone got out fine. It'd be way too convenient to expect that handsome guy to burst into the scene here, though."

Frederica: "I, see. Your last encounter involved the current Sword Saint-sama. But, regardless, that does not matter. I do not wish to know the methods used previously to repel the woman. I would rather like to know her personality."

Subaru: "Her personality?"

Subaru tilted his head at Frederica's rather nebulous question.

Subaru: "I mean, her personality is just as you see, she's a weird fetishist. She's the Bowel Hunter, loves cutting open people's stomachs and checking out the insides. She's up there in the worldwide danger rankings."

Frederica: “And judging by how she appeared to enjoy her confrontation with Garf, she would be particularly fixated on doing the deed by her own hands... Correct?”

Subaru: “Not like I know her, but yeah. She’s probably that kind of character. I don’t see where you’re going with this, though?”

Frederica: “It is simple, Subaru-sama— The enemy is experiencing some unexpected events during this raid, as well.”

It was a powerful assertion. Subaru’s eyes widened in surprise.

Frederica: “Witchbeasts are presently encircling the mansion. The young girl also present is likely a manipulator of Witchbeasts. We shall perhaps call her a Witchbeast Master. The enemy’s true designs had been to assault the mansion whilst the siege of Witchbeasts was in place, and attack those of us inside, would be what it appears.”

Subaru: “What makes you think that?”

Frederica: “—The timing between the attacks from the Witchbeast Master and the Bowel Hunter are not the same.”

For a moment, Subaru furrowed his brows in thought. But he immediately realized what Frederica was trying to say, and hit his fist to his palm.

Subaru: “That’s it, so that’s it! Shit, why didn’t I notice it? Yes, Frederica’s got it right! With that weirdo’s personality, of course it’d be like this!”

Otto: “Wh—what is it? I don’t quite see how everything connects—”

Subaru kicked the floor in frustration and excitement. Otto looked somewhat nervous, but Subaru just nodded to him.

Subaru: “It’s really simple, Otto. The Witchbeast attack was actually meant to corner everyone in the mansion. And once we’re cornered, we can’t run away like normal. So we would head for the hidden passage— That would be the natural course of events, right?”

Otto: “That would be exactly the course we have followed, correct? But weren’t we saying the enemy knows about the secret passage, and so we cannot use it?”

Subaru: “Exactly. The correct course of the attack is, we’re cornered and run into the hidden escape path, and that’s where we all get killed by Elsa lying in wait. That’s their plan. But it’s gone astray. Elsa isn’t in the passage right now.”

Otto: “———”

Why was that? Considering Elsa’s disposition, the answer became obvious.

Subaru: “Elsa did not want to miss out on prey, so she started moving on her own. That’s why she’s out of tune with the Beastmaster. And that means she’s not at the spot that she’s meant to be blocking— So there’s no one at the hidden passage!”

Frederica: “The original plans had been for the woman to lie in ambush in the passage. Consequently, since events are diverging from their plans, it is extraordinary unlikely that a rear guard would be presently occupying the passage. The enemy shall surely realize that the situation is divergent from their plans should they be given time. Likelihood is steadily increasing that they may send another individual into the passage.”

Petra: “So we gotta race there while no one’s around!”

Following on from Subaru and Frederica’s theories, Petra practically jumped as she answered. Subaru laughed, appraising her conclusion with a “Full marks”, as he put her hand on Petra’s head, patting her auburn hair vigorously.

Subaru: “With the information we have, this is the most likely case. Either way, it looks to have more promise than breaking through the Witchbeast perimeter outside. And worst case, we can at least check what’s happening with the office. Let’s do it. This is the only way we’re all getting out safe!”

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—Ready for that plan, the team had arrived to this sight outside the office.

Everyone was both physically and mentally exhausted. Regardless, the hope of reaching their goal had filled them with enough energy to move their incredibly wounded selves. And now, that flicker of hope had been—

Subaru: “You have to be kidding me.”

Muttered Subaru reflexively after reaching the top of the staircase and peeking into the hallway. Otto poked his head out above him, as did Petra below him, and seeing the same thing, they agreed with Subaru in dumbstruck shock.

Frederica: “What has happened? Is the Master’s office...?”

Frederica sat on the stairs behind them as she asked that of the three scouts. But judging by their reactions, she had likely surmised that the situation was looking bad.

Subaru stifled his footsteps as he turned around, rather anxiously.

Subaru: “There’s a real nasty-looking one camping outside the fucking room.”

—To Subaru, it looks like the monster Chimera.

A lion-esque feline head, with the skinny body of a horse or a goat. Its long tail whipped about like a snake, and although it was smaller than the Beastmaster’s hippo mount, it was stupidly huge enough to block the mansion’s expansive hallway. A strange entity which looked like it had burst out of myth— its prowess in combat easily deduced from sight alone.

Otto: “That... is the Witchbeast Guiltlaw. It... It lives deep in woodlands thick with Miasma, something like the king of beasts... And now, in a human village... It’s not the kind of Witchbeast that you could possibly bring with you to a mansion...”

Subaru: “What are chances that we are overestimating it, and it’s actually a wimp? Like, it looks like that, but in reality its personality’s gentle so you can just feed it *katsuobushi*¹⁸⁴ and it’s happy, or something...”

¹⁸⁴ Literally “dried bonito flakes”, consists of simmered, smoked and fermented tuna. For more information, see [here](#).

Otto: “I wouldn’t know what *katsuobushi* is, but are you suggesting approaching it with food? It will probably end in the beast chomping you in half.”

Otto’s statement made Subaru think of how huge the Guiltlaw’s head was. Indeed, with a mouth that big, Subaru was a two-bite meal.

Subaru: “No, but Garfiel’s even bigger when transformed. Okay, let’s go get him and compare sizes. If our guy’s bigger, then that guy will sneak away dejected.”

Otto: “If we go back to summon him, then that woman will carve us to bits. You can stop being funny, Natsuki-san. Have you thought of any ideas?”

Otto entertained Subaru’s joking, but his gaze was expectant, turning to Subaru. It was like he had expected Subaru to have come up with some idea over the span of that little exchange.

Thinking Otto was placing quite the ridiculous expectations, Subaru glanced back to Frederica and Petra—

Petra: “Subaru.”

Frederica: “Subaru-sama.”

—And they were gazing at him with expectation too.

Subaru: “—Seriously, just what expectations are you putting on me?”

Giving a deep sigh, Subaru shivered at the weight of those huge expectations. He adjusted Rem’s position on his back, and closed his eyes.

What, presently, were the combat forces they could muster?

Frederica was injured and Otto had no magical power. Neither Petra nor Subaru were fighters, and they were on the third floor of the mansion’s main wing. There was no way they could call Garfiel up here, and even thinking of getting Beatrice’s help was a bust.

But that said, fighting while using everything available was the only technique Subaru had ever had at his disposal.

Everyone's abilities, their capabilities, materials present, the opponent's situation, the requirements, Subaru mulled over all of them, considered all of them, thought over all of them— And exhaled.

Subaru: "If neither martial nor magic forces are looking like they'll work, time to stake it all on my unmatched knowledge from the twenty-first-century."

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The first thing to catch Guiltlaw's attention was a sound.

Guiltlaw: "———"

Having heard the peal of something hard tapping and tapping and tapping against the floor, Guiltlaw raised his snout.

The Silent King of the Woodlands— some locations indeed referred to Guiltlaw as such, and unlike other Witchbeasts, he did not favor needless roars nor pointless noise.

Contrary to his great frame and queer appearance, he soared deftly through the wastes, making not the slightest sound in approaching his prey before landing a single fatal strike and slaying the creature. This sort of sneaky and assassination hunts were his greatest forte. Thus, although his Master had ordered it, Guiltlaw could not see the hunt of lying in ambush in one spot as anything but foolish utilization of his prowess.

Although naturally, he had not the slightest intention to be an ingrate and defy his Master's orders. Because by breaking his horn, Guiltlaw had been allowed to escape from his curse.

Guiltlaw: "———"

Guiltlaw cast his snout around, searching for the source of the sound while ruminating on his Master's orders. Remain in place outside this door, and hunt any enemies what may approach— such was the duty that Guiltlaw has been tasked with, and his Master's desire.

Those high defenseless tapping sounds clearly were footsteps.

Many two-legged creatures, such as his master, made this sound when they walked. The truly strong were amongst their number, those who did not even make such noise as footsteps, but the owners of these footfalls was not among them.

They were undefended, uncalculated, unintentional, unheeding— devoid of a single speck of grace. Guiltlaw found them irritating to chew on for even for a meal, with how utterly weak they were.

Guiltlaw: “———”

Silently, Guiltlaw slid away from the door. The footsteps were coming from the western staircase, the direction from which he had heard intermittent sounds of battle for some time now.

Guiltlaw knew that his Master had brought in other Witchbeasts besides himself. While instructing many beasts inferior to him in both strength and size to surround the mansion, his Master had tasked Guiltlaw with defending the door, mounted herself upon a large and dimwitted beast, and went hunting.

It had dissatisfied Guiltlaw that she had chosen that beast, only good for its size, for her hunt, and left him behind to guard the rear. But should the foes he face here at least be powerful ones, then he could both agree with his reason for being brought here and preserve his honor.

Thus, Guiltlaw had not done anything so foolish as leaving his post to attack the enemies, no matter what beasts they faced, until they managed to reach this very spot. A weakling who could not even reach Guiltlaw’s location did not merit battle. A weakling butchered by beasts weaker than himself did not merit the hunt.

However, the prey had overcome the other Witchbeasts, and arrived at this spot. The second that Guiltlaw sensed their presence, he felt secretly thrilled.

—And this was what he had been waiting for? Something fragile, ignorant of even the concept of hiding footsteps, with such weak lust for battle. One swing of his claws, one flourish of his fangs, would scatter this fleeting, inferior being to bits.

Guiltlaw: “———”

What surged inside him was rage. Only rage.

His fangs would ravage the prey, and without a single lump of their flesh going down his gullet, he would leave them scattered about the floor.

That was the only thing that would assuage this burning feeling of insult.

Pursuing the footsteps, Guiltlaw moved without even casting any shadow over the moonlight. Should there be anyone to witness him as his great frame sailed silently in motion, they would surely think themselves observing a nightmare.

The ebony assassin approached the footsteps, finding that the prey seemed to have stopped at the next bend— Guiltlaw drew his claws to bisect the prey from behind.

Guiltlaw: “———!”

With not the slightest sound, Guiltlaw stretched out his neck and jumped onto the prey’s back— however.

Guiltlaw: “———?”

The prey that he had caught, and sensed to be within mauling range, was nowhere to be seen. Unsure of where to swing his upraised paw, Guiltlaw stalled for a millisecond, feeling something awry. He sniffed as he turns his head.

Where had the foolish, frail, flimsy prey gone?

Guiltlaw: “———!”

Once again, the noise of footfalls reverberated in Guiltlaw’s ears.

He lowered his head and looked toward the noise, to find that it seemed to be echoing from the stairway. The noise of the prey’s footsteps, descending, running down the staircase. It appeared they had noticed his presence and sped up somewhat to avoid him. But should Guiltlaw learn of such a thing, then he would never allow the prey to flee.

Guiltlaw turned his head. Looked at the door that his Master had ordered him to protect.

He may be distancing himself from his post, but this prey was surely the exact prey that his Master had given out her orders for. Should he slaughter the prey, that was tantamount to observing his Master's orders. With that decision, Guiltlaw pursued the gracelessly fleeing prey.

He was effectively teaching the prey the moment they had turned their back on him, they lost any means of resistance— never mind the fact that they had been within range of his strikes.

For Guiltlaw, who dashed over mountains and reigned over the woodlands as King, the hunt of fleeing prey was an everyday act of amusement. The only prey worthy of being absorbed into this flesh were the truly strong. Prey that would turn their backs and lose their fangs to resist him merely existed so that he would not forget the feeling of blood and gore on his claws and fangs— and they ought to learn this too.

Guiltlaw descended the staircase, following the footsteps. He kicked off the wall at the stairway landing, dancing through the air to the floor below. He reached the second floor, then the first floor in pursuit of his prey, and now stood in the lowest floor of the building.

He perceived the distant signs of fighting. The scent of his Master, and the stench of the annoying dimwitted beast accompanying her. The remaining scents were of blood and steel, the aroma of the strong.

Guiltlaw: “———”

Were it possible for him, he would prefer to venture in that direction, and participate in the fight. He wished to brandish his claws and fangs in presence of his Master, ripping the strong fighter to pieces and drowning them in a sea of blood, supping upon the taste of victory.

However, he must not desire such a thing right now. He had orders to uphold.

—Should he swiftly hunt this prey down, perhaps his participation would be permitted.

Guiltlaw: “———”

Guiltlaw felt the burning in his fangs ever more keenly, his body shuddering. Again, he heard the footsteps, and pursued them to hear a door close further down the dark hallway, before looking at it, freshly closed.

Darting over, standing silently before the door, Guiltlaw used his long tail to dexterously open the entry.

This was not his first time invading the dwelling of the two-legged creatures and brandishing his fangs.

He understood how these doors functioned, squeezing his massive frame through the doorway as he sneaked into the room. He had been expecting the prey to be waiting here at this very moment, but he could not find the slightest glimpse of them, and yet again Guiltlaw was utterly surprised.

But his disappointment this time does not hide far away—

Guiltlaw: “———”

Turning his head, Guiltlaw’s gaze landed on a corner of the room— the wardrobe.

Sticking out from the crack between the wardrobe’s two doors was from the prey’s clothing. They had swooped inside in a panic, their clothes caught. The shallowness of this prey, believing that they were hiding from Guiltlaw while failing to realize their failings, was humorous.

Guiltlaw silenced his footsteps and crept near the wardrobe. He raised his tail, sharpened its tip, and did not hesitate for not even a second.

Guiltlaw: “———!”

His tail penetrated, piercing easily through the wardrobe like a spear. It left a round hole as if made by a drill— and many more of them. Coin-sized holes were stabbed one after another into the wardrobe, skewering the pathetic prey cowering inside.

Once more than twenty holes had been punched open on the wardrobe, Guiltlaw ceased attacking with his tail. He reached out his front paw and yanked the wardrobe door so that he may observe the pathetic, dead prey. The perforated door opened easily, and the prey inside—

Guiltlaw: “—Grah!?”

The instant Guiltlaw went to confirm the corpse’s presence, a burning shock to his nose made him recoil.

A terribly intense stench shot through his nostrils, the sensation so painful he could wail. He promptly looked back at the wardrobe, to find a transparent bottle, broken and overflowing with colorless liquid.

The stench was coming from this substance. And the prey was not inside the wardrobe. The protruding cloth had merely been clothes protruding from the wardrobe.

Guiltlaw: “———!”

Once again hearing footsteps echo from the hall outside the room, Guiltlaw turned around. His nose was not working, but his eyes and ears were fine. He spotted a shadow dash down the corridor, and while lamenting the humiliation of having his nose disabled, pursued the shadow.

Guiltlaw had never faced such humiliation in his life.

This was not a bold and honest confrontation against Guiltlaw, who had overwhelmed all enemies he had ever faced until now, nor was it him easily sinking his fangs into fleeing prey. This was an entity scrambling so horrendously for life, so wretched Guiltlaw had never seen anything like it before.

Assuredly, kill them. Slay them. Maul them, splay them over the dirt, trample them.

Guiltlaw: “———”

Forgetting to even silence his footsteps, Guiltlaw’s massive frame soared into the room into which the footfalls had fled.

He easily blasted through the twin doors. What welcomed him was a room remarkably larger than the others he had seen. A large table stood in the middle of the room, and at the back of the room was a fireplace. Candlesticks were lit upon the table’s white tablecloth. In a room with the moon as the only source of light, the flames flickered bewitchingly.

Guiltlaw: “———”

Fire was an irritating thing for Guiltlaw. Even during day, when the great globe of white fire remained in the skies overhead, Guiltlaw detested fire being near him. After all, the forest Guiltlaw lived in had been engulfed in flames, and so he lost his peaceful home. His horn was broken, and he began obeying his Master during that affair as well. Fire prompted memories of both liberation and humiliation for Guiltlaw.

Guiltlaw: “———”

He heard no footsteps. But he did hear something else. Opposite the door he had just barreled through was yet another door, on the other end of the large room. From that likely-cramped space beyond the door, he sensed something.

Guiltlaw sniffed, but his sense of smell had yet to return. He could not smell the aroma of the prey wetting itself in terror. Once he mauled the prey, it was likely he would be unable to smell or taste its blood either, which was a disappointment.

But he could put those sensations off for another time, as long as he succeeded in slaughtering the prey. Right now, only erasing this sense of humiliation blazing in his chest and making the prey who disgraced him shriek its death wail would offer Guiltlaw any solace.

Guiltlaw: “-----”

Guiltlaw stepped forth, heading straight for the room. Then he stabbed his sharp tail into the room’s door. It was soon filled with holes just like the wardrobe, and Guiltlaw pulled the door open before taking a breath and leaping inside.

Guiltlaw: “-----Ooooh!!”

He soared into the room, roaring. His bellow intimidated the prey, scaring the weakling so that it may compensate him by having its flesh torn into by his claws and fangs.

He whipped his tail about, spreading destruction throughout the room, when dust erupted from shredded bags and boxes sitting on the cupboards. His forepaw slammed down on the floor, shattering it and shredding through the cloth draped across the ground for dust to erupt yet again, from below— but no. These plumes of dust, thick enough to block out Guiltlaw’s vision, were only growing thicker.

Guiltlaw: “-----!?”

Guiltlaw’s vision drowned in white, his windpipe being invaded the second he took a breath, making him cough. Some kind of, massive quantity of flour was dancing through the air.

Enough flour to rob him of his vision, and even rob him of the breath needed to roar.

???: “Got him!”

Someone, some creature, spoke. Guiltlaw heard their voice not from inside this room, but the previous one,

???: “Eat this, the soul of science— Flour explosion!!”

With a sound, something was hurled into the room covered in white.

The bright, flickering thing was one of the candlesticks from the table in the previous room. The candlestick struck the wall, its flickering flame falling on the floor and blooming larger for an instant.

Guiltlaw: “———”

???: “H—huh...?”

But that was all.

The candlestick remained fallen to the floor, doing nothing in particular. The speaker sounded like it had misunderstood something, and Guiltlaw knew they were standing petrified outside the room.

Guiltlaw: “———!”

Guiltlaw’s instincts told him that he was never getting this opportunity again. The enemy had experienced some breed of failure. And if that failure had not happened, Guiltlaw would have been in danger.

Comprehending this, Guiltlaw twisted his body, electing to escape from this room.

If he were able to exit to a spacious room, a place where he could swing his paws and his tail freely, no plans drafted by his prey could present an issue. He would use the overwhelming disparity in strength to force them to submit, and wrest victory.

There was no need to do anything more than that——

???: “Didn’t I tell you? Instead of doing that nonsense!”

???: “It’s quicker to just do this!”

The instant that Guiltlaw thought of soaring out of the room, he heard two more prey speak.

A low voice, and a high voice. The moment he realized these were prey of different genders, Guiltlaw sensed that the shelf behind him was collapsing toward him.

The string drawn across the entryway was connected to the leg of the shelf. That string was forcefully tugged, and the shelf collapsed onto Guiltlaw's back. But its size only allowed it to hit Guiltlaw's massive behind.

The force the blow carried inflicts absolutely zero damage on Guiltlaw.

Calmly taking the blow, Guiltlaw severed the string with his claws. And when he prepared himself to definitely leap out of the room—

Guiltlaw: “———?”

The cupboard opened, and a liquid overflow, streaming all over Guiltlaw's body. It felt slimy, unlike water. It was slightly yellow in color, and having it slathered over his prided black coat was hideously unpleasant for Guiltlaw.

But that discomfort disappeared instantly.

Guiltlaw: “———!?”

???: “Here is Otto Suwen's personal investment of trading oil— Take as much as you want!”

The prey's voice called from outside the room. But Guiltlaw had no leeway to mind the weak prey's voice in that moment.

—The oil he was covered in caught on fire, detested flame burning his body whole.

Guiltlaw: “———!!”

The King of Beasts, who had descended from the plains, who was eternally obsessed about his throne in the woodland skies, combusted in flames as hot as his humiliation without ever knowing what had bested him.

Arc 4 Chapter 127A - The Final Day of the Roswaal Mansion

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 15, Chapter 3 “—Giltirau, Black King of the Forest, Strikes!!”, Parts 4, and Volume 15, Chapter 5 “I Love You Down to Your Blood and Guts” (first half)

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by SummaryAnon — [Complete](#), Page 182

Subaru: “Otto, you mentioned something about using wind and water magic to make footsteps ring from far away, right?”

Otto: “...Actually I believe that we did talk about that before, but I am impressed that you remembered. Magic that simple isn’t impossible for me even with my currently impoverished Mana, but... How would I use it? The only time I ever use it is when I want someone to turn around for a moment.”

Subaru: “We’ll be using it exactly how you said. You make footsteps peal, pull their attention, and guide them into a trap— Then I blast them away with the soul of science.”

Otto: “You sound absurdly confident about this, though what exactly is this «soul of science»...?”

Subaru: “Simple, strong, certain death. A dust explosion. The methods and materials are simple. All you need is some fire and flour. If it’s powerful as I know it is, it’s going to be more than enough to blast away just one single monster.”

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Otto: “That’s what you said, then I believed you and helped you do it, and this is what happens!”

Subaru: “Shut up! Scientific progress always comes with sacrifices! Why didn’t it work!? There wasn’t enough flour, or not enough fire, or... are the laws of physics just different in this world? So that’s why the dust explosion didn’t...”

Petra: “Aaagh! None of that even matters, focus on putting it out! Ahh, oh no! Oh no!”

Petra butted in, screaming, into Subaru and Otto’s yelling match. The three of them were in the kitchen on the first floor, lit by the glow of blazing flame. Because—

Subaru: “You used too much oil! How are we gonna put this out!? It’s spreading!”

Otto: “Do you think it’s possible to shirk out on oil when hunting such a ludicrously huge monster!? And even if we couldn’t take the flammables out and simply left them there, the results would be the same anyway! You are definitely paying the fees for this afterwards!”

Petra: “Just stop it, you guys! This isn’t the time for this! We can’t put it out! Run!”

Subaru: “You sound like a middle schooler failing to recover from a mishap with fireworks...”

Said Subaru, exasperated, when he noticed the tablecloth in his hands had caught alight. The flames did not go out no matter how he batted away at them, so he resignedly dumped the cloth into the fire. The fire from the storage pantry had spread within an instant, and the flames had started circling around to the dining room and kitchen as well. It felt like the spellstones they used for cooking would get caught in the blaze and explode at any second.

Subaru: “We sacrificed way too much for this...”

Frowning, Subaru looked down at the charred corpse fallen at the threshold between the pantry and the dining room. It was the beast that had been blocking the door to the office on the third floor, which Otto had lured downstairs with his sneaky magic, then got covered in the storeroom oil and burned to death.

It had brains befitting its brawn and had graciously triggered every single trap without suspecting a thing. Fortunately, it was seemingly susceptible to fire, falling into a panicked frenzy once it caught alight, and had proceeded to burn up without doing anything else.

Subaru had indeed faced a conundrum upon his dust explosion’s failure, but Otto and Petra’s backup plan of using oil led them to victory.

For once, you could say that Otto and Petra’s failure to understand Subaru’s lectures on the terror of dust explosions, and dimwitted insistence to lay down insurance, had saved them.

But if there were problems that had arose from this, then that would be that the flames that had killed the Witchbeast. Even after felling the beast, the blaze had not settled down. The fire burned the walls of the mansion, burned the food inside the pantry, tongues of flame reaching to the legs of the dining room table.

It reeked of smoke, of a fatal and burning world. Subaru's vision began to haze. In this land without fire brigades, they were lacking in enough water magicians to put out the fire.

Subaru: "I knew that renovation worked would be needed after this, considering how Garfiel and Elsa are fighting and Witchbeasts are prowling around... But it's so big we'd have to reconstruct the building..."

Otto: "This is not the time to discuss it, Natsuki-san. We'll follow Frederica and escape. Swiftly, before the third-floor staircase stops existing."

Petra: "Hurry! Hurry!"

It all felt unreal to Subaru as he watched flames engulf the familiar scenery, when Petra and Otto tugged at his sleeve.

Otto and Petra were the only people here except Subaru. Frederica and Rem split up with them when they began their plans to trap the Witchbeast, and had also been tasked with judging when the beast moved away from the door, and then securing the hidden passage in the office.

It had worried Subaru to entrust the task to Rem and to a wounded Frederica, but thinking about pure combat ability, it was a sensible plan. Even when unable to use an arm, Frederica was far more than capable of defeating Subaru and Otto.

And either way, they had succeeded in repelling the Witchbeast.

While praying their read of the situation was correct and no other enemies would be found in the passage, Subaru's team burst out of the dining hall and sprinted up the stairway, aiming for the top floor.

Subaru: "What do we do if Garfiel dies in the fire!?"

Otto: "Garfiel surely isn't that stupid, he will be well! And it's possible for him to escape by charging through the Witchbeasts outside!"

Subaru was anxious about the fire's spread, and how it chipped away Garfiel's battlefield. Otto's shouts are correct, but seriously what if—

Petra: "Frederica-neesama!"

While Subaru brooded, the three reached the third floor. Out of breath, Petra sighted Frederica standing outside the office, waving towards her. Frederica seemed to perceive that the group's fight had been successful, and relief washing over her instantly.

Frederica: "Thank goodness, you're safe. It comforts me that nobody is missing."

Otto: "Please excuse me, may I ask why you are saying this while staring at me? Do you mean I seem likely to go missing? Please stop, I'm near to weeping!"

Subaru: "Yeah, yeah, just calm down, calm down. We'll put improving your reception aside as an issue for later, and for now think about how to deal with our current problems. Frederica, how's the passage?"

Frederica: "It operated without any issue. And I have confirmed that the path itself is also safe, at least as far as the inner room... Incidentally, am I simply imagining this smell of something burning?"

Frederica narrowed her eyes as she asked about the stench that tickled her nose. Subaru grimaced, looked at Otto and Petra, and the two shook their heads.

Subaru: "Ummm, well we kinda made a couple mistakes, and the fire we used for defeating the monster got really huge. And so..."

Frederica: "The mansion has begun to burn. I had not anticipated that the building would return to a state of complete normalcy, but now it shall burn down entirely... In comparison to our lives, it can be replaced."

Subaru: "Oh, you get it. Yup. Yup, it's an inevitable sacrifice."

Frederica: "I have little sentimental connection to this mansion. Instead, Ram's should be fond of the building, so you would best prepare yourself for a scolding afterwards."

Subaru: "Ugh."

Imagining the relentless and endless chastisement, Subaru suddenly felt reticent for their reunion. But it was good that he could think about the future like this. Frederica smiled wryly at Subaru's attitude, and a relaxed atmosphere spread across the scene.

Subaru: "Now, we just forced another time limit on ourselves, so let's get out of here quick. Frederica will take the lead, then Petra then Otto. The second you're out of the passage, you should be in a safe area... Hard to tell what side of the barrier you'll be on, but either way follow Frederica's instructions. If possible, meet up with the villagers who fled with Patrasche. That would be best."

Calling an end to the jokes, Subaru quickly explained what their current goals were. Frederica and Otto's expressions tensed as they nodded in response. But Petra furrowed her brows. She raised her little hand and called, "Subaru?".

Petra: "I—Isn't this kinda funny? It almost sounds like you're not coming with us..."

Subaru: "—It does. I'm sorry, but I'm not leaving with you. We're splitting up."

Petra: "Why!?"

Petra cried in surprise to Subaru who replied affirmatively. She reached out and grabbed his sleeve, her fingers shaking, trying to keep him from going.

Petra: "Let's just run! The mansion's burning, and there's so many scary monsters! You can't beat them in a fight, can you, Subaru? So won't you run?"

Subaru: "Well, you're right, so I have no excuses to pull, but I'm not gonna fight. Though I guess in a sense, it is a battle."

While happy for Petra's concern, Subaru gently unhooked her fingers. He saw grief permeate her big, round eyes, paining his heart.

Otto tapped her shoulders from behind, taking care not to startle her.

Otto: "Petra-chan. Natsuki-san has something that he needs to do. Until he's done it, he cannot leave the mansion."

Petra: "But! Subaru's weak! He's in danger! We should just leave you behind instead, Otto-san!"

Otto: “You’re not saying that because you believe in my strength at all, are you!?”

Shaking her head, Petra looked up at Subaru with tears in her eyes. Subaru knelt to get on Petra’s eye level and patted her head.

Subaru: “I’m sorry, Petra. You, and Rem, and Frederica will all escape the mansion safely. But that still isn’t the entire reason for why I came back to the mansion. There is still one more person I must get out of here.”

Petra: “B—Beatrice-sama?”

Subaru: “Yes. Have you met her?”

Petra shook her head. Petra had started working here about ten days ago. She had not caught sight of that shut-in girl even once during her time living here. Beatrice was indeed a hardcore shut-in.

Even though Subaru used to basically never leave his room either, except to go to the bathroom.

Petra: “I—is she really around? You sure you aren’t just thinking too hard, and fooling yourself that she...?”

Though she probably did not intend to, Petra had begun doubting reality.

“Could it be that this person only exists inside your own head?”, was what she was asking.

Subaru: “She’s an absolute pain, she’s lonely but a complete meddler, takes everything upon herself and answers questions all on her own and suffers for it. She can’t settle issues on her own, so she wants someone else to end it for her.”

Petra: “...”

Subaru: “I’d really rather not think I could come up with someone like this in my imagination. If I’m gonna fantasize about anyone, it’s going to be a helping character with their fondness gauge at MAX.”

Beatrice would never do a single thing that Subaru wanted even once, did not know what she or others desired, was trying to give up on thinking, and was the pinnacle of annoying.

And so Subaru needed to teach her.

Subaru: “You know, Petra. Beatrice is basically the same age as you. And with how you’re mature in lots of ways, you might resemble her first friend.”

Petra: “Her first friend?”

Subaru reminisced on the past Theta mentioned. He thought about Ryuzu Meyer, Beatrice’s old friend, who had left a permanent scar on the girl’s heart. Beatrice and Ryuzu may not have recognized it themselves, but from an outside perspective, they had been obviously friends.

Subaru: “Petra. Once I come back with Beatrice, you will definitely be her friend. You’ll like her. Because it’s so fun teasing her.”

Petra: “Even more than Otto-san?”

Subaru: “Yeah. You don’t even need Otto anymore.”

Otto looked like he wanted to say something, but Subaru consciously ignored him. He drew his hand away from Petra’s head and stood up.

Subaru: “I’m doing it. I’m searching for Beatrice. I’ll do my best not to die in the fire, but if I do burn to death, then I want the records to show that I died because of Otto’s oil.”

Otto: “I’d really rather have that not happen. If you don’t come back safely, I’ll slap you, I swear.”

Otto spoke his mind, looking miffed, as he set his hands on Petra’s shoulders, drawing her near him. As if he was drawing a line between Subaru, and the four of them.

Subaru: “Frederica. I’m counting on you.”

Frederica: “I will not spare my health. I swear that I shall cut open a path to our escape.”

Subaru: “Be sparing. If we can’t keep you, it was pointless for me to come here.”

Frederica’s eyes widened. It wasn’t often that Subaru saw her looking so surprised. It actually felt kind of nice.

Finally, Subaru looked at Rem, on Frederica's back. The sleeping princess showed no signs of seeing Subaru off. It was fine. Rem was not meant to see Subaru off. Subaru was meant to greet her.

Petra: "Take care, Subaru!"

Turning his back to the four, Subaru broke into a run. Even at their parting, Petra's voice washed over Subaru's back. But he did not glance behind him. Petra did not desire him to, either.

The flames were spreading steadily across the mansion.

—With his hand to a door left unscathed, Subaru had to wonder whether this fire would reach the Forbidden Library.

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The shield caught the blade as it slashed down, and to a screech of sparks and metal, the knife flowed away.

Weaving into each other's openings, a forceful kick plunged into Elsa's stomach— She took the blow, rotating to dissipate the strike's force, and used her momentum to slash at Garfiel, her blade closing in to slice his head in two, but.

Garfiel: "Lax!"

Elsa: "Goodness. How harsh."

Garfiel's wide open jaws closed down on the blade, making this the fourth mouth interception of the day. The force of Garfiel's jaw shattered the knife instantly, and Elsa salvaged her hand before leaping backwards in retreat. The theft of her favored weapon made her only smile deeper.

Elsa: "If you were wrong by even a hair, your head would have shot off. Doing that is certainly impressive."

Garfiel: "Got the trick to it down. I'm startin' to get bored of how you fight, right now."

Elsa: “How cold. Looking like you understand a woman entirely, when you’ve only known her a short while.”

Garfiel: “...Fuck off with that entrappin’ phrasin’, oy— Hrmm.”

Garfiel stuck his finger in his ear, grimacing, and sniffed as he noticed something. He looked down the hallway, his mouth curving into a grin.

It did not look like Elsa had noticed it yet, but Garfiel’s sense of smell had picked up the stench. That was the stink of stone and wood on fire— otherwise said, the aroma of flame.

Meili: “—Ahh, geez, I can’t believe it! He’s sooo useeeleessss!”

Right after Garfiel smiled, the girl atop the Witchbeast puffed out her cheeks. Elsa glanced at her and Meili remained peeved as she continued,

Meili: “Apparently the Shadowlion who’s meant to be stalling the others just died. He never listened to my instructions anyway, and he got mad really quickly so he was always a problem, but... How did he manage to die when aaalllll he had to do was nap outside a door?”

Elsa: “The true question is, why did you bring such a useless beast with you?”

Meili: “The Shadowlion was the only one except Rockpiggie neither in rut nor hibernation. And yet he still died, I can’t believe this.”

Meili groaned as she tossed yet another knife to Elsa. Elsa received it, confirmed the feel of its grip, and remained utterly apathetic to the information from Meili.

It didn’t look like Meili cared at all about the dead Witchbeast either. Poor creature. Regardless, what he had overheard made a wicked smile arise on Garfiel’s face.

Meili: “Eww. Scary-looking precious guy, you’re making a real nasty face.”

Garfiel: “My mug’s nastiness ain’t a match fer the Captain’s. ‘N anyway, ain’t it exactly what I told ya? Yer sneaky plots ain’t nothin’ to the Captain ‘n his happy band of friends.”

Elsa: “While yes, they have exceeded our expectations... Where does that leave them now? The slaughter of one useless Witchbeast does not change that we have the power of numbers on our side. We continue to keep you, their pivotal combat force, pinned here... And nothing especially changes about their predicament.”

Garfiel: “Yeah, yer right.”

Elsa held her two knives loosely while Garfiel crossed his arms. He sniffed again, reflected back on his fight with Elsa until now— and decided.

Garfiel: “It’s ‘bout time for things to get movin’.”

Elsa: “What do you—”

Meili: “Elsa!”

Garfiel’s statement made Elsa raise her brows. But before she could finish her question, Meili cried out.

Garfiel looked to find that the Boulderpork’s eyes had changed color, the giant animal so agitated that it was stomping around on the spot. Meili called out to the creature, getting it slowly back under control. But it seemed like the Witchbeast had, just like Garfiel, noticed the fire.

Meili gave a few pets to the Boulderpork to calm it down, then looking gravely at Elsa.

Meili: “Elsa, the building’s burning. Somebody set it on fire.”

Elsa: “———”

Garfiel: “Hell are you sayin’ with that «somebody»— ‘Twas was obviously the Captain. Makes sense, it’s good that it’s so straightforward. Witchbeasts are beasts. If yer gonna drive ‘em away to make a path, quickest way’s to scare ‘em with fire.”

Meili: “But... Then he came to the mansion to save the people inside, only to burn it down in his escape?”

The decisiveness of Subaru’s actions stunned Meili speechless. Elsa also looked to be having trouble consolidating this information, perhaps because it did not fit with her image of Subaru.

But Garfiel's heart remained horribly calm in contrast to their surprise.

Naturally, Subaru had not told Garfiel beforehand that he was planning on going this far. Garfiel did believe Subaru was someone who took daring actions, but not even he expected that Subaru would burn down the mansion. It made Garfiel feel comfortable as someone who decided to go under Subaru's tutelage.

And most importantly, the fact this situation had been arranged lighted a spark in Garfiel.

Garfiel: "Mansion's burning. Outside's a horde of Witchbeasts."

Elsa: "———?"

Garfiel: "Got people we gotta save, 'n adversaries we gotta stall. Th'only guy who can fight's me, 'n the Captain told me he's leavin' this up to me."

Meili: "What are you suddenly going on about, Mister..."

Garfiel: "It's goddamn obvious."

Elsa tilted her head. Meili looked like she was observing something creepy. Garfiel clicked his fangs, feeling refreshed.

His body was light. Nothing was scaring him anymore.

Garfiel: "With all these conditions in place, what fuckin' man out there ain't gonna get fired up!? I'm damn goin' for it, like «facing the Dragon, Sword Saint Reid laughs and draws blade»."

Elsa: "You recognize that saying is used for someone abnormal and insane?"

Garfiel: "Ya bet I know. And? Yer sayin' there somethin' wrong 'bout my amazin' self 'n you bein' here?"

Garfiel affirmed his own stupidity with a refreshing momentum, leading Elsa to stare in utter astonishment. But for nary a moment. She immediately grinned, licking her lips as her eyes softened beautifully.

Elsa: "You are correct. You are sincerely correct. You have stated it perfectly."

Agreeing with him, Elsa pointed the knives she wielded at Garfiel. She crossed her blades, her long, black hair dancing as she tilted her head.

Elsa: “But would you mind if we had a change in attitude? I doubt that you are suddenly going to grow any stronger, and I also suspect that you have recognized this after clashing with my constitution numerous times. A bout may leave me as the more wounded party, but the confrontation will still remain unproductive.”

Garfiel: “Yer right.”

About ten minutes had passed since Garfiel and Elsa started fighting.

Steel had already met steel over one-hundred times, each competing viciously with the other. Garfiel held a slight advantage in terms of combat ability. He narrowly surpassed Elsa in brute strength, in speed, and in technique, never once conceding predominance.

But Elsa could heal her wounds in mere seconds, happily accepting injury without feeling pained in the slightest, never once hesitating in either offense or defense.

And on the topic of wounds, it was worth mentioning that Garfiel was also wounded. He also needed time to heal himself, while Elsa did not.

He was inferior to Elsa in terms of stamina. Should the fight turn into an endless cycle of bouts, then her blades would soon catch Garfiel. However—

Garfiel: “Five... No, maybe six? That’s how many times my amazin’ self did you in.”

Elsa: “Yes, you may be correct. And?”

Landing a direct hit with a kick, smashing her into the wall with his shield, grabbing her by the leg and slamming her head-first to the floor— Garfiel had already landed many fatal strikes on Elsa. The injury had healed every time, and he truly had not achieved anything, but—

Garfiel: “I was anticipatin’ four or five times at best.”

Elsa: “———”

Garfiel: “Vampires ain’t immortal. You pile enough killin’ blows on ‘em... ‘n eventually they’re gonna run outta life. That’s what I’m gonna be doin’ to you before this mansion’s all burned down.”

Garfiel took his stance, legs apart, as he laughed ferociously with his fangs on full display.

Elsa heard him in silence, the smile vanishing from her face. She fiddled with the end of her braid before giving a quiet sigh.

Elsa: “Meili— Give it to me, and you pursue the others.”

Meili: “Elsa... Are you serious?”

Elsa: “When you’re given a reason to do it, failing to do so is discourteous to the opponent. My only regret is that I may not be able to extract your guts cleanly.”

Replied Elsa with her eyes closed in meditation. Meili did not question further.

She dropped the knife holder she had been championing to the ground, and drew a different holder— One containing merely two knives, and threw it towards Elsa.

Garfiel: “Hmm?”

Garfiel hummed cheerfully as he watched Elsa draw the knives from their holder. These two blades radiated a pressure so intense that none of the others she had used so far could compare.

The knife in Elsa’s left hand was completely black from handle to blade. It looked identical to the kukri she had been using at a glance, but this one’s blade was curved with countless, bestial fangs down its edge, specialized more for goring for slicing.

The knife in her other hand was the exact opposite, pure white with a thick body. It also looked like a kukri, but its thickness made it seem like it could snap bones with a single strike, and pairing it with the black blade made its ruthless image multiply greatly.

Garfiel: “Yer tellin’ me that’s yer ace?”

Elsa: “These are the ones I use when I’m focusing on killing the opponent, rather than seeing their guts. If you exclude Mother, you are the third person I’ve ever used them on.”



Garfiel: “That’s one hell of an opinion I ain’t glad for, ‘n one hell of a family I ain’t jealous ‘bout, oy.”

Garfiel scrunched up his face at the unpleasant confession.

Meili gave orders to her Witchbeast as she nimbly moved herself. The dimwitted beast stomped the ground, charging through walls as it headed towards the main wing in pursuit of Subaru’s group— however.

Garfiel: “Well, thanks for showin’ me yer ace. You’d cry foul if I didn’t show you mine, yeh?”

With that, Garfiel stomped the ground. Immediately, a pulse rushed out of Garfiel’s sole and through the ground, speeding down the hallway, passing beneath Elsa before reaching the Witchbeast— and exploding.

Pork: “———!?”

Meili: “Rockpiggie!?”

The earth caved in beneath the beast, which lost its balance and crashed into the wall as it fell. The impact rocked the mansion, and Meili was unable to stay atop the Witchbeast, instead coming to land in the hallway. She stroked the fallen Boulderpork’s rump as she looked at the floor, seeing the unnatural depression, and glanced behind her.

Meili: “Don’t tell me, you did this?”

By utilizing his Divine Protection of Earth Spirits, Garfiel could conjure depressions and protuberances in any surface within visible range that could be judged as being ground. Of course, it had a few differences in effectiveness depending on how far away the target was or how large a scale he was aiming for, but it was more than enough for him to bluff with.

Garfiel had learned from Subaru to laugh with a complete lack of shame, when in hold of something others could not be allowed to find out.

Garfiel: “It is what it is. Yer safe to think that not lettin’ yer escape’s an expression of my will. Long as my feet are touchin’ the ground, y’ain’t escapin’ from anywhere my amazin’ eyes can see.”

Elsa: “Meili. You can put minimal forces upstairs. Call the others, and awaken that beast.”

Meili: "...Mama will be mad."

Elsa: "What will truly earn us a scolding is failing to remove the threat. And, I doubt we'll have the leeway to worry about what will come afterwards."

Garfiel: "So ya do get it."

Meili's expression lost its calm as she nodded, put her fingers to her mouth, and whistled.

Garfiel silently watched on as the thin sound echoed far, all throughout the mansion. If those two were speaking the truth, then Witchbeasts should be approaching this place before long.

This situation was only blazing hotter and hotter.

Elsa: "I'll pluck off your limbs and shoulder you home once you're lighter. I doubt all this will be worth it if I'm unable to enjoy myself to my heart's desire."

Garfiel: "Where's th'option to just quit it with that guts thing?"

Elsa: "I'd rather quit breathing."

Garfiel clicked his neck at the statement, before stooping forward in preparation to receive the enemy's strike.

Elsa swayed loosely and nimbly positioned her white knife behind her, putting strength into her arms.

Elsa: "—I assure you that I, more than anyone else, can love you to your flesh and bones."

A horrific, debauched smile. The shriek of blade rubbing against blade. And—

Garfiel: "—Gaaaaah!?"

The white knife sticking diagonally from Garfiel's left shoulder had broken his bones apart.

—The battle between the Bowel Hunter and the Shield of Sanctuary, had entered its final phase.

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His beaten shoulders, his hips, his head all hurt. He was battered all over after falling many times, always stifling his pained moans from the impact dead.

He ran, ran, ran, out of breath, knees shaking, eyes fogged, ran. It hurt to breathe. He kept his head low, so he would not inhale the smoke. The flames had already engulfed the majority of the building, through which he sprinted, he searching for a yet-untouched door.

Subaru: “—Hk.”

Discovering an unopened door, Subaru dashed madly towards the doorknob and wrenched the thing open. Before him an utterly mundane guestroom was revealed, which would shortly drown in a sea of flame. Leaving sentimentality aside, Subaru left the door open as he ran for another room. He tried the adjacent room, and the one adjacent to that one, and the one adjacent to that one, opening every door he gazed upon—

Subaru: “—There!”

Freeing him from the scent of soot and char, the stench of aged paper streamed out of the room. Subaru sniffed the familiar, musty smell as he stomped across the boundaries of the room. He raised his head, and addressed the person occupying it.

Subaru: “Hey! Enough of this, stop being angry and listen to—”

Beatrice: “Get out, I suppose!”

An invisible shockwave went through Subaru, threatening to blast him away. But Subaru managed to hook his fingers on the carpet, defending himself from the force.

Amidst a pressure so intense it could drag him backwards, Subaru’s cheeks twisted into a smile.

Subaru: “Hah! Don’t underestimate me too much. You think I’d put up with getting thrown out of here so quickly, over and over, by the same meth—”

Beatrice: “I won’t say it again, in fact!”

Subaru: “Blargh!?”

A thick book rode the wind to smack against Subaru's forehead, making him dizzy and sending him tumbling, flying backwards, ejecting him from the room.

He was shot down the corridor and crashed into a wall. He shook his head as the door closed itself in front of him, and he hurriedly leapt at it— It was too late already. This room was no longer connected to the Forbidden Library.

Subaru: "Asshole...! Who're you taking after, goddamn loli...!"

After violently kicking the door open, Subaru broke into a run, in pursuit of another door.

The fact the room had not sent him to the second floor of the eastern wing, somewhere in the vicinity of Garfiel's fight with Elsa, was probably because of Beatrice's kindness.

Subaru: "Then at least listen to me, stupid!!"

Beatrice had to be thinking the exact same thing from within the Library.

Keenly feeling that truth, and having been rejected times upon times, Subaru sprinted through the mansion in search of the door to the Forbidden Library.

With the fight in the western wing in its final phase, and the fire from the main wing blazing through the whole building— It was only a question of time until Roswaal mansion burned to the ground.

Arc 4 Chapter 128 - I Love You to Your Blood and Guts

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 15, Chapter 5 “I Love You Down to Your Blood and Guts”
(latter half)

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by SummaryAnon – [Complete](#), Page 195

He drove his fangs into the green tail slipping before him, and mindlessly tore it apart.

Purple fluids splattered everywhere and vivid blood showered his face, but he did not care. His left eye had already been bathed in venomous fluid and blocked shut for ages.

He roared to obfuscate the burning pain before slamming his arm into the two-headed snake, killing it. He kicked its corpse, keeping everything in front of him in check as he retreated, and that was when the chill raced up his spine—he instantly recoiled.

And the grisly blade screamed past, grazing his chin.

The Witchbeast in the blade’s path became prey to the fanglike knife. Flesh was shredded, blood splattered in sheets, a scramble of organs forming a curtain before him—which he charged through, aiming for the woman who had perpetrated that tragedy, before ramming his arms into her torso.

Elsa: “———!”

His right shield at her chest, his left shield at her flank, her flesh squelching and bones cracking at each point.

At his ears, before his eyes, from all directions came the cacophonous cries of beasts, their shrieks, his roars, crashing conflict, the pounding of metal on metal, too many noises mashed together for him to properly register the world.

He did not care. This stuff in front of him, in his vision limited to his right eye, that was real.

Her voluptuous breasts sunk in, the force of the gut-wrenching blow making her vomit blood. Even with her scarlet lips turning a deeper shade of red, and faced with pain that was enough to threaten her life, her expression remained raptured.

Maybe it was not her combat strength. Nor was it her stamina. But that mentality of hers was perhaps the real nuisance.

Elsa: “—Haa!”

Garfiel: “Sha!!”

Her short exhale. His responding roar.

She swung her left arm from behind to front, shrill noise echoing out from behind him. The slash reflected off the wall, rebounded off the ceiling, hit the floor as it flew for the back of his head.

Garfiel: “———”

He directed his attention behind him, extinguishing the idea of evading it from his mind.

The woman before him drew her right arm back firmly, preparing to shoot her serrated black knife into him. If it was intended to catch him between the two knives, then this blow would likely slice open his head, or maybe his throat.

He tilted aside, forcing himself out of the blade’s path as it rushed to stab the back of his head. A dull sound was heard, originating from the vicinity of his left shoulder blade. Feeling the tip of the rebounding blade bite into a gap between his bones, he clicked his tongue— when the knife sliced into his joints, rendering his right arm motionless for the time being.

Elsa: “Huaaah!”

Garfiel: “Shah!”

So violent as to mute all sound, she loosed the readied blade. This unremitting attack was less of a terrifying sharp slash, instead more of a pointy bludgeon.

The strike would blast his head off should it hit, mutilating it completely. Garfiel immediately raised his left arm to intercept the strike, but with his poor posture, he could not avoid all the damage to his right shoulder.

Animal teeth shrieked against metal for only a microsecond, before Garfiel's arm was easily forced away.

With only a meagre drop in its speed, the black blade resumed its charge towards Garfiel's head. More than enough strength to cleave apart his skull charged in, a second from hitting.

Hitting—

Elsa: “———!?”

—What Garfiel had kicked up, forcing it into the path between his head and the knife, the Witchbeast's corpse.

An uncomfortable feeling like hard-skinned vegetable against his cheek, and blistering venom that burned all skin it touched. Risking being bathed in both these things, he reaped the benefit of avoiding fatal damage.

The knife sliced into the Witchbeast's corpse, the battering force of the blow proceeding through the cadaver to strike Garfiel across the face.

The impact pummeled him, sending him rotating left to right, spinning in circles— and with two resolute steps into the ground, he soared backwards.

His Divine Protection of Earth Spirits activated, obeying his will to make the ground he had stepped on explode. The detonation had sent him soaring further backwards, the woman now to his back as he proceeded to zoom straight for her— With the woman's white blade still sticking out of his shoulder.

The instant the blade touched her, the woman flinched. Though she knew that the side contacting her was the pommel, it had still made her falter from making any instantaneous decisions.

With his right shoulder still rubbing against the woman, Garfiel spread his stance, dropping his center of gravity.

The instant this made the woman decide to step backwards and distance herself, Garfiel's arm shot up, grabbing her face in a vice-grip.

Garfiel: "—Partial Transformation!"

Immediately following his scream, a change occurred in the arm clutching her face. It swelled explosively—growing a coat of golden fur in an instant, transforming into the arm of a beast, as thick as a log.

And naturally, its end was a beast's paw, with saber-like claws,

Elsa: "Kyaaaaah!"

The thick claws gouged into the woman's face, splaying blood everywhere and making her recoil. His five fingers inflicted the same pain and injury as knives as they carved into her head. Even she had to feel obligated put her hands to her face, backing up, shrieking while looking to the ceiling.

Garfiel: "Hrm!!"

He plunged a kick into a torso, shunting her back. The force battering her chest carried more than enough strength to further destroy her shattered bones and ruptured innards, churning them into a greater mess.

The fallen woman dropped her weapon, spitting up pure scarlet as she gives a faltering laugh. It was horrible to listen to, and he was more than ready to swoop in and make it stop, but,

Garfiel: "Tch! Just one after another!"

Just as Garfiel moved to pursue her, Witchbeasts flooded the gap in his assault.

Blackwinged Mice, Banassi bloated in proportion to their anger, Spotted Rex assembled here from throughout the mansion, and a restored giant—the Boulderpork, all rushed in.

His claws ripped apart the swarm of rats, one stomp of his foot eliminated the swollen Banassi, his kicks snapped the necks of the Rex snapping at him, all as Garfiel faced the charging Boulderpork head-on.

Meili: "Get squished!"

Garfiel: “Ya think I’m gonna be takin’ that, y’dumbass!”

A mass, weighting at several tons, was charging with explosive force.

Rather than a blow from an animal, this cannonball was equivalent to a building dropping on him.

Not even Garfiel was able to take a direct blow from it and get out safely. He would be unable to offer even a second of resistance; he would be blasted away and crushed flat.

However,

Garfiel: “That’s what makes it fun—!”

Stomping with both his legs, Garfiel unleashed his Divine Protection of Earth Spirits to its utmost limit. He felt the blessing of the earth pulsing up from underfoot, rippling through his flesh.

A glint of war lighted Garfiel’s golden eye, fangs bared as he smiled wickedly, detonating the blood lying dormant inside him.

Garfiel: “—OOOOOOH!!”

This strangled bellow was not addressed to the outside, but was a call to his own insides.

Flowing through his body, difficult to accept as it is, laid something he had definitely not acquired by choice. His bloodline. He called to his usually-hidden pedigree, feeling goosebumps as his very soul trembled.

Just like his left arm, the one that had tore the woman’s face apart, Garfiel’s right arm swelled explosively. Starting at his arms, his shoulders, his torso, his neck, his head all crunched as his skeleton changed shape, his face morphing from that of a human to that of a ferocious feline— a massive tiger.

Following the enlargement of his torso, his hips, his legs, his clothing all failed to endure the pressure, bursting apart. Scraps of cloth hunt off his frame, the two shields on his arms barely managing to stay equipped as small bucklers— A beast that, by physique alone, was on the level of the oncoming Boulderpork, had appeared.

Garfiel: “———!!”

The floor creaked, caving in beneath him.

Even the solidly-constructed mansion could not endure the confrontation of these two absolutely massive beasts. So big that the hallway was unable to contain him, Garfiel shattered the walls, ornaments crashing to the ground as his back scraped across the ceiling.

Meili: “—Rockpiggie!!”

The girl atop the Witchbeast shrieked, in response to Garfiel’s transformation.

She was probably screaming the name of the Witchbeast. Answering to its master’s call, the Boulderpork let out a roar strong enough to disintegrate boulders and opened its maw wide, with all its teeth flat enough for a millstone, racing for Garfiel.

The Witchbeast reared up on its back legs, raising its forelegs to stomp Garfiel flat.

The massive tiger, its golden eyes flaring, had its own legs propel it into the opening just before the behemoth’s crushing blow connected. And stabbed its claws into that thick, stony hide.

Blades screeched against bedrock, as the tiger’s claws were peeled out of their sockets. Knives failed to puncture the thick hide, and the swine’s plummeting forelegs proceeded to slam straight into the tiger. The stomp pressed down on the tiger, causing crushing pressure on its shoulders. The force pinned Garfiel’s upper body to the ground, the merciless impact prompting the tiger to scream.

Meili: “Don’t stop, Rockpiggie!!”

Bones shatter and flesh was crushed, but the noises did not deter the Witchbeast’s master. Hearing her wailing voice, the Swine roared and raised its forelegs, ready to stomp once again and crush the tiger’s head once and for all. However—

Garfiel: “———!”

If his claws would not work, the tiger had only one weapon left.

Twisting its neck, its shoulders crushed, the tiger used its spine to upright itself. The Boulderpork’s forelegs were raised, and its belly exposed— the tiger bared its fangs.

Not even a Witchbeast with skin as solid as rock could have its entire body at the exact same toughness. Compared to its legs or back, its vital regions were, logically, less heavily shielded. And so, the tiger drove its sharp fangs into the Boulderpork's bare stomach.

Meili: "Rockpiggie!?"

Garfiel: "—GRRRRRRRRRRRRRR!!"

The tiger's jaws, so immense they could swallow a man whole, closed around almost half of the Swine's extensive belly.

For a moment, the Boulderpork's hide did pose some resistance to the piercing fangs. But like the point of a knife stabbing into a fruit, the sharp fangs effortlessly tore through the thin skin after only a second.

The Boulderpork's shriek arrived as the tiger kicked the floor, using the momentum to roll sideways. With his fangs still sunken into his prey, attempting to shred the creature apart— that was the hunting behavior of the aquatic sub-type of dragon, named water dragons, that dwelled in rivers.

Were Natsuki Subaru present to witness it, he would have deemed it as being something close to the death roll of an alligator, a creature that did not exist in this world.

His hindlegs hit the floor, gaining rotational and forward force as he mangled the Boulderpork's torso. Inside the thick hide, a vast store of blood and guts was found, which spilled out from the bite wounds relentlessly, and onto the floor of the mansion's hallway.

Pork: "———Ooooooooooooo..."

Eyes wide, their whites exposed, the Boulderpork collapsed, alongside its weak death wail.

The tiger spat out chunks of the Boulderpork's flesh before slamming its rear leg into the massive creature, toppling it onto its side. The girl, having dismounted the Witchbeast at the moment it had crashed, was utterly lost for words as she watched her Witchbeast's gruesome death.

Meili: "No, way... I don't believe it..."

Stepping back, the girl glanced behind her to see what forces she had left.

Many Witchbeasts had heeded her call, and were steadily assembling. But they amounted to merely a mob of small- and medium-sized creatures, none of them large like the Boulderpork.

Meili: “Ugh! What is this!? Elsa! Elsa! Dooo somethinnngg!”

Elsa: “...That is a rather, unsparing demand.”

Realizing that she was at a disadvantage, the girl threw senseless insults as she called her partner’s name. In response to that voice, a shadowy woman, crawling out of the darkness, spoke.

Her mangled face had regenerated. She fiddled tirelessly with her bloodied braid.

Elsa: “Gouging a woman’s face open without hesitation, you are indeed marvelous, you.”

Garfiel: “—Ooh! Ooh! Ooooh!”

The woman laughed with a blood-soaked grimace. The tiger, shoulders broken, growled in agitation. Its massive form quaked, then butting its massive head against the fallen swine, and puked.

The tiger growled in pain as its great body begun losing mass, and bit-by-bit its enlarged form started to return to human shape. After a few seconds, there now stood a half-naked boy, batting away shredded bits of golden fur.

Garfiel: “Ah... Fuck, I’m back. Head hurts...”

Elsa: “I see... So you are half-beast. I did think your eyes looked rather nasty for a human.”

Garfiel: “If we’re gonna be followin’ yer logic, that means our Captain ain’t human either.”

Garfiel shook his head, getting a grip on the state of his own human body.

Over the course of returning to human form, his broken shoulders had mended to the point they could both move. However, they still flared with pain every time Garfiel moved them, turning his thoughts into a blaze of soldering white.

He could not stay in top performance for much longer.

But the same went for his opponent.

Garfiel: “Went ‘n busted open yer Witchbeast’s guts for ya. Yer allowed to happily swim ‘n that ocean of blood there, I ain’t gonna mind.”

Elsa: “I’ll have to refrain. Animal guts are no substitute unless I am extraordinarily starving. The beauty of guts is that they are disemboweled from people.”

Garfiel: “Yer aesthetics make no sense to me.”

Garfiel stuck his pinky into his ear, picking it rigorously while sighing in astonishment. Elsa had an overwhelmingly disadvantage, but her attitude did not budge.

—Garfiel had estimated that it would take five more tries until Elsa’s immortality ended, at most.

And Garfiel had already fatally injured her four more times. Five if the mauling of her face were included. It should be about time for her to start hitting her regeneration’s limitations. That would mean that Elsa’s stock of lives had already been exhausted. Garfiel was injured as well, but that was not going to make him slack in this fight.

If she had no hope of support possibly coming from Meili’s beasts, the situation was that they effectively had their blades at the other’s throat— So why was she so composed?

Elsa: “It’s not that there’s any special reason for it. You don’t have to be so scared.”

Seeing Garfiel’s brows furrow in puzzlement, Elsa spoke as if comforting a child. Garfiel scowled his face in response, growling like an animal.

To obfuscate the fact that she had clearly seen the slight confusion in his heart.

Garfiel: “Bunch’a crap. Stop talkin’ like ya know anythin’.”

Elsa: “But it’s clear to see. Disemboweling someone means facing someone before they are disemboweled. Your face is a familiar one to me.”

Garfiel: “———”

Elsa: “It’s the face of being unable to comprehend someone who is a deviant.”

Garfiel fell speechless, his throat feeling to clench. Elsa put her hand to her mouth and laughed, smiling slightly as she tilted her head.

Elsa: “Don’t worry, it’s fine. I’m not wishing to be understood by anybody. My happiness is something I acquire by trampling the life of another. To live is to bring about death.”

Garfiel: “...I’m gettin’ that if I take this seriously, I’m gonna go nuts.”

Garfiel raised his arms, battering his shields together as he rejected any attempt at understanding her. He did not have the leeway to be thinking about her circumstances. And her last statement had just eliminated any reason he possessed to pay attention out of whimsy.

Garfiel: “But I’ll ask ya this. If ya pledge y’ain’t ever gonna do nothin’ bad again ‘n run away, it’s not impossible that I let you go.”

Elsa: “You truly are a precious boy.”

She was shown her final mercy, then dispelled it with a smile— That was the signal, to charge.

Blasting off, Garfiel soared ahead. Elsa countered him by swinging her white blade up to hit the ceiling, hit the floor, revolving and rebounding as it closed in on Garfiel.

Elsa’s wide white blade was composed of multiple knives strung together. The blade’s edge alternated from one side to the other, the knife rippling like the bones of a snake, as it bounced through the hallway.

Up? Down? The knife easily outsped the eye, soaring about as a white light. Garfiel braced his shields over his head, abandoning the option to evade. The knife plunged down into his upper left arm, imparting him with the pain of broken bones as he continued his advance.

Elsa: “The land I was born in was Gusteko of the north, a very, very cold country.”

Split-second combat was unfolding in this battleground, but for some reason her song-like voice snuck into Garfiel’s ears.

It was not even audible. His consciousness was blazing, focused in the instantaneous trade of deadly attacks. There was no opening for this voice to butt in.

That was how it should be, but the woman's voice slipped smoothly into Garfiel's consciousness.

Elsa: "It is a country with a wide gap between the rich and the poor, and it was not uncommon at all for lower-class children to be abandoned. I was one of those children, with no parents I ever knew, drinking dirty water to survive."

Garfiel: "—Grahhhh!!"

Elsa: "I spent my days stealing objects, threatening people, doing things of that ilk, with the people around me constantly changing. Why am I alive? What is happiness? Those were not questions I had any time to consider back then."

His fist plunged forward, inches from belting Elsa's face.

But she leaned aside to dodge the exaggerated attack, slicing her black blade to cut shallowly through Garfiel's torso.

The bestial fangs plundered his flesh. Elsa licked her lips as the bright blood bathed her.

Elsa: "That day was a particularly cold day."

Garfiel: "Shut up! I ain't goddamn listenin'!!"

Elsa: "The wind blowing from the lofty mountains was so strong, so cold, that it froze the town that day. My breath could freeze in that chill, when the shopkeeper I stole from caught me."

With a passionate sigh, Elsa spoke on, enraptured. Her blades of death increased in momentum, slicing cut after cut into Garfiel as he failed to keep up.

Elsa: "No one would complain if he killed me, but upon noticing I was a girl... I can still remember his face as he laughed vulgarly, moving to strip my clothes."

Garfiel: "Gah, ah..."

Elsa: "The bitter wind howled as he stripped my jacket, snatched my underwear... And when I contemplated that I would rather freeze and die before he could do anything to me, I happened to pick up a shard of glass."

Her leg swept up to try and belt him in the side of the head, but Garfiel countered it with a headbutt. The impact reverberated through his brain and caused him to recoil, but it surely had shattered Elsa's foot too. Elsa drew her leg back, retreating. But her expression remained one of ecstasy.

Elsa: "I wasn't thinking about anything. I just had that shard of glass, then when he leaned forward, I pressed it into his stomach, moved it, and sliced him open."

Garfiel: "——"

Elsa: "I felt nothing for his screams, or the fact that I had taken a life. But amidst that icy gale, I did think."

Garfiel's breathing froze. Elsa smiled an enchanting smile.

Elsa: "How warm are blood and guts."

Elsa's blade swung up, threatening to split apart Garfiel's skull. He slid to the side, kicked off the wall to reposition himself behind Elsa, and slammed a kick into her back— but she instantly twisted around and delivered a blow to his shin with her pommel, diverting the kick.

His leg crashed into the wall, which crumbled alongside plumes of dust. Garfiel clicked his tongue as he jumped back and away.

Elsa: "If there is happiness in the world, then it is in the warmth and beauty of forgetting the cold. From birth I had nothing, and now I had this, the first definite happiness I had ever found— You cannot understand, can you?"

Garfiel: "Ain't wantin' to, either."

Elsa: "That's fine. I don't want sympathy."

Garfiel: "Then why'd ya tell me such a damn story, it's gross."

Elsa: "Why, I wonder?"

Garfiel's eyes housed hostility as Elsa tilted her head, mystified. And she narrowed her eyes obscenely, licked her lips lasciviously—

Elsa: “Because I find you truly darling.”

Garfiel: “...Sorry, but I already got a girl I like. Ain’t got time to be datin’ no crazy fuckin’ bitch.”

Elsa: “So rude. But it’s fine. I’m only concerned about your innards.”

It felt like a conversation was happening, but fundamentally, that was not the case. Over all his exchanges with her until this point, Garfiel had finally come to understand this.

He had no interest nor sympathy nor anything else for Elsa’s life story. That was her foundation, she had those experiences, and she had become this monster. That was all. Garfiel’s shields already knew who should be protected.

Garfiel: “—I will kill you, Elsa Granhiert.”

Elsa: “Once I kill you, I will adore you, Garfiel Tinsel.”

Each calling the name of the other, the half-beast and the murderer waged violence.

The beaming light of the white knife sliced through the corridor’s darkness, and the black knife pressed forward would cleave Garfiel in twain.

A knife ricocheted everywhere in the corner of his vision. He could not defend against the attack, nor did he have the option of evading it. But if he failed to take the blow without it dampening his charge, he would merely be repeating the same foolish mistake.

Garfiel: “———”

The knife sliced through sound, dancing throughout the hallway. If he could not perceive the blade’s aim, he could only aim for the point it had been thrown from.

Garfiel thrust out his left arm, the fasteners on his shield loosened— and lets the thing fly.

He had loosened the bindings back when he had battered the shields together. Now he was tossing it, Elsa’s eyes shot wide open as it smashed directly into her left hand— a crunch echoed, and her broken fingers dropped her white knife.

Having lost the hand handling it, the knife stabbed into the ceiling, remaining still.

A deep, dark smile, and a surging roar. A deathly blade murdered the very air as it was swung down, Garfiel charging straight into it, and struck him.

He placed his right arm upon his head to receive the direct hit from that black blade. The shockwave pierced through his shield, rocking his skull vigorously. His eyes spun, and he came close to stumbling forward, but just managed to stomp firm and catch himself.

He had endured it— When the woman's knee shots up and smashed Garfiel's nose.

Elsa: "You must not be careless and think you're safe."

She said with a laugh, sweeping her leg up at Garfiel as he recoiled.

Her leg was lifted high, and from her shoe arrived the glint of a blade in the heel, its point aimed to stab Garfiel through the neck—

Garfiel: "Yer the one who better not be overlookin' my amazin' weapon, bitch."

His open jaws swallowed her heel and the blade whole, gnashing at her slender foot. With her bones and the knife chewed up to the heel, Elsa's eyes shot open wide.

Elsa: "Goodness."

Yelping in surprise, Elsa staggered away, losing her balance, and tumbled to sit on the spot. Her right leg was mangled from the ankle down, inoperable, and the force of her own attacks had broken her arms as well. With her left leg as her only support, Elsa gazed at Garfiel—

Elsa: "—Ahh."

Taking in a breath, Elsa blushed like a girl in love.

Her exhale carried enough heat to be chromatic. Her wet eyes were filled with passion so hot it would not grow cold.

—Before Elsa, Garfiel shouldered the immense Boulderpork, and threw it.

Although aware that she would be crushed beneath its incredible mass, it was not until the silhouette swallowed her that Elsa's gaze strayed from Garfiel.

Her breathing ragged, gazing at the grimacing blond boy with love——

Elsa: "What a thrill."

The overwhelming weight crushed the murderer, the vampire, the Bowel Hunter, until nothing remained untouched.

Her flesh squelched. Fresh blood mingled with fluids from the Witchbeast. Scenting the stench of death, Garfiel howled.

Roaring, bellowing, booming like thunder through the burning mansion.

——The battle between the Shield of Sanctuary, Garfiel Tinsel, and the Bowel Hunter, Elsa Granhiert, had concluded.

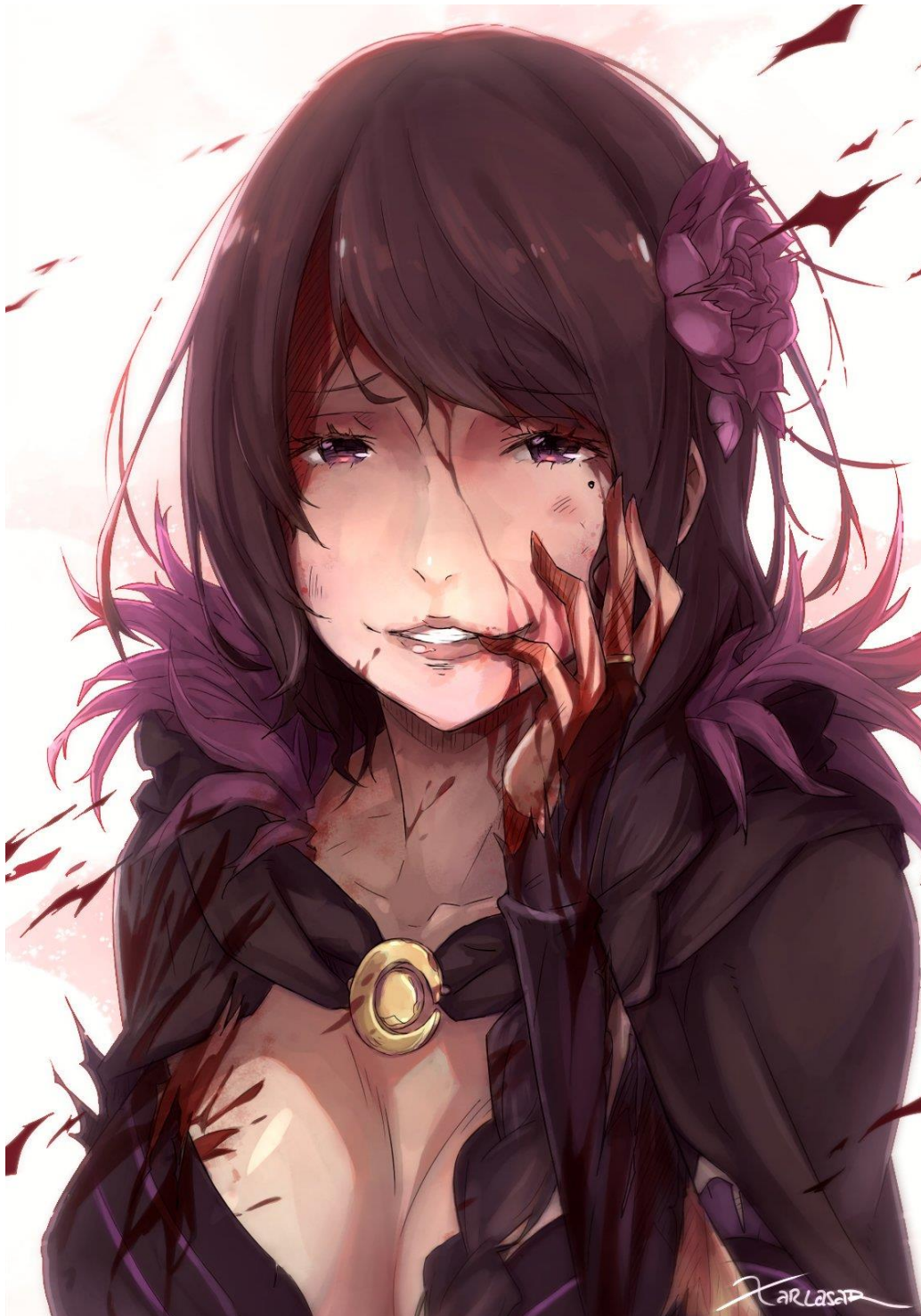


Illustration from Volume 15, coloring by Xarlasar ([source](#))

Arc 4 Chapter 129 - —Choose Me

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 15, Chapter 1 “The Final Day of Roswaal Manor”, Part 1, and
Volume 15, Chapter 7 “—Pick Me”

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by SummaryAnon — [Complete](#), Page 205

—Whenever she thought back on that instant, the terror assaulted her.

How her clinging fingers had been cast aside, and her name been affectionately spoken.

The love in their goodbye. The determination and tears in their smiling eyes. Both carried far more than enough weight to silence her.

What should she have said? She still did not know.

What had she been thinking? She could no longer remember. What ought she have done? She still failed to see any answer.

—And so Beatrice remained, even now, cowering motionless in the Forbidden Library.

Beatrice: “...Ryuzu.”

The sound out her lips was a fragment from a memory so ancient, even just the word sounded wistful. When she spoke that name, emotions bursted, and the frozen time inside Beatrice, the four-hundred year void, instantly came surging to the surface.

Beatrice had secluded herself inside the Forbidden Library, waiting for That Person’s eventual arrival, only after Ryuzu Meyer had been lost, as her existence became impetus for the establishment of Sanctuary, the Warlock, Hector, repelled.

Beatrice had lost someone so close to her that they could safely be called her only companion. Anyone could see how haggard Beatrice had been, having lost that friend due to her own inability. And everyone knew that only time would mend her injured heart.

So her Mother's conclusion was simple.

Echidna: "I suspect that Warlock will return to destroy me someday. I plan to set up means to oppose him before that happens... but even that might be fallible."

Beatrice: "Yes, Mother."

Echidna: "If we engage in confrontation again, it will develop into truly heated, absolute combat. Considering the enemy's strength, my chances of surviving are about fifty-fifty... or maybe a little lower? Since Roswaal has unfortunately lost his gate, and so cannot assist in battle."

Echidna lowered her gaze, but Beatrice's unaffected demeanor remained stable.

It was not as if she was suppressing anything. Ever since that day, her emotions had almost entirely stopped showing on her face. Who could suppose the effect that the overwhelming loss, the emotional aftershock, had had on her?

It could have been that her emotions had frozen over exactly because her heart knew that effect.

Echidna looked at Beatrice and her unchanged expression, running her finger through her white hair.

Echidna: "I am already among the Witches least suited to combat. Once I know I cannot enlisting aid from Roswaal, genius in sorcery, I must expend all possible means to finally begin seeing hopes of victory."

Beatrice: "...What should Betty do, I suppose?"

Everyone knew that Roswaal had been half-killed in the battle to establish Sanctuary's functions. His gate had been utterly decimated, making him ineligible as a magician.

The sight of her comrade lying in bed, still moribund in this very moment, rose in Beatrice's mind. Sounding somewhat desperate, she assaulted Echidna with questions.

Beatrice: “Should I do the same as Roswaal, and buy time until your algorithms are complete? Or should I sacrifice myself, as I am a conglomerate of powerful Od, and become the nucleus for the algorithm, I suppose? I will not regret it for an instant because it is for Mother’s sake, in fact. Please, use me however you’d like, I suppose.”

Beatrice grasped her skirt and displayed a curtsy, displaying the greatest of trust to her mother.

Honestly, the emotion was far too brittle and fleeting to be called trust. But Beatrice was unable to comprehend her own present mental state, and even supposing that she understood herself, she would have likely reached the same solution.

Reckless lust for vengeance, and indignation at her powerlessness— The question of whether she recognized these two feelings of hers constituted the only single difference.

Echidna: “—I see. If you say that, even I can ask for favors without any reproach. You truly are a good girl, Beatrice.”

Beatrice: “...Yes. Betty’s your daughter, in fact.”

Hearing such words from Echidna would usually overjoy Beatrice.

Perhaps Echidna was aware of that, for she was careful to give Beatrice verbal praise only infrequently. But now those magic words sunk into Beatrice’s empty chest with a hideously hollow thunk.

Perhaps nothing would rekindle the fire in her heart.

That was what Beatrice thought, and so she failed to immediately react to Echidna’s next words.

Echidna: “Beatrice. I’m entrusting you to oversee my Library of knowledge. Until the time that must come does come, you’ll protect the knowledge as the Library’s keeper— So that nobody can steal it.”

Beatrice: “...Wha—”

Echidna: “Fortunately, you have unparalleled affinity for Yin magic. You will use Door Crossing to link a familiar location to an isolated space... Yes, we’ll call it the Forbidden Library. There, I want you to guard over the extent of my knowledge, compiled into books.”

Beatrice's eyes shot open in shocked turmoil as Echidna continued speaking, leaving her behind. Beatrice had expected Echidna to order her to accompany her in this battle of life and death. Having been cast into an utterly unanticipated role, Beatrice could only glance about in bewilderment.

Even though witnessing her daughter's discomposure, Echidna proceeded, without missing a beat.

Echidna: "It would be best to link the Forbidden Library to Roswaal's mansion. I will dismantle my laboratory, and prepare for the final battle. I am sorry, but I cannot expend any people to carry the books. I would like you to ask Roswaal about preparing the bookcases and securing labor."

Beatrice: "W—wait..."

Echidna: "It will not last forever. Both you and I are already liberated from the fetters of predestined lifespan. The cycling of the seasons is not especially meaningful for us. But even saying that, once you consider that I may be lost, it's irresponsible if it lacks a deadline. Which means..."

Beatrice: "Please wait, I suppose!"

After a deep breath, she shouted.

Beatrice could not comprehend what her mother was saying.

No. Her instincts were screaming at her, telling her not to comprehend it. Echidna's thoughts were vast, and always reached beyond what the ordinary man could possibly understand with ease. Meaning that Echidna's statements represented the optimum, and Beatrice had never thought to interrupt her before.

But now was not like that. Nothing like that.

If Beatrice let Echidna speak her whole screed, she would surely regret it.

If Echidna stated the whole of her opinion, what she would present was the absolute optimum solution with no purchase for debate. The world would follow a course affirming Echidna's stance, and Beatrice would be unable to defy it.

To defend against that, Beatrice must interrupt before Echidna could finish.

Beatrice: “Mother... What are you saying, in fact? I... I don’t understand what you mean with this Forbidden Library, I suppose. Betty is! Staying with you!”

Echidna: “Having you with me will not influence the confrontation with the Warlock much, unfortunately. Naturally, it would surely increase my chances, but... Only by a pittance. It would fall under statistical error.”

Beatrice: “B—but if it’s better than me being absent, then Betty will help you, in fact! It’d be—”

Echidna: “You cannot. The risk of us both being destroyed outweighs a tiny, potentially non-existent boost to my prospects of winning. Considering that there is a less than fifty-percent chance that I will survive this battle, I have to endeavor to ensure my knowledge survives to the hereafter.”

And ensuring her knowledge survived to the hereafter meant the management of this Forbidden Library that she was trying to entrust to Beatrice.

In this moment, Beatrice cursed her Door Crossing and her ability to create unique spaces. If she did not possess these powers, her mother would never desire that she take this ro—

Beatrice: “Don’t... tell me... My powers were for this?”

Echidna: “———”

Beatrice: “Mother knew from the beginning that this would happen... Supposing so, then not just this Forbidden Library, wh—what happened in Sanctuary was also...”

Echidna: “Having ways to anticipate things does not necessarily mean those routes must be used. I did have means to both perceive this route and settle matters without travelling it. But I swear on my way of life that I have not utilized that power. That alone I want you to believe.”

Echidna shook her head in response to Beatrice’s strangled question.

Echidna approached Beatrice, who was chewing at her lip, before taking a book from the bookshelf and presenting it to her daughter.

Beatrice: “This, is...?”

Echidna: “An imperfect replica of my Book of Wisdom. The Book of Wisdom’s algorithms are both advanced and complicated, so I did not manage to fully unravel them all... But it should be enough to work as a simple guide for the owner’s future.”

Beatrice accepted the book, tracing her shaking fingers over the cover.

She raised her head to look at Echidna, who stared at Beatrice with the same faraway gaze she always had. As though she was looking somewhere into the distance.

Echidna: “There are two books. One goes to you, and the other has been given to Roswaal. I expect Roswaal will manage what comes next, provided he reads the book. I know it is a one-sided request, but I want you to see it through.”

Beatrice: “-----”

Beatrice looked down at the book, her eyes wavering as she finally realized that it was far too late. “I have to make her speak, I have to make her say it”, were her ideas, but they were not nearly sufficient.

Echidna, her mother, had already decided all her answers. Beatrice could cry, pleading and clinging, but it would not change Echidna’s stance.

Because that was the kind of person the Witch of Greed Echidna was, and the kind of Witch she was.

Echidna: “Let us return to the topic of the deadline. I might not return, but the Library must be opened to someone someday. Once that happens, it shall be clear to you. Someone suitable to inherit my knowledge will surely come for you.”

Beatrice: “Come, for Betty...”

Echidna: “We will dub this person That Person. The deadline shall be set to the moment That Person opens the doors to the Forbidden Library, and announces that your duties are over— This is my final wish.”

—Final wish.

The phrase made Beatrice swallow her breath, and looked up at Echidna’s face as she gazed back at Beatrice.

Her mother's constant, unchanging expression. But Beatrice felt that, in just this single instant, it was mixed with unfamiliar emotion.

Echidna: "Betty— Please, be well."

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After parting with Echidna, Beatrice obeyed her mother's request and went to stay in Roswaal's mansion, using her Yin magic to create the Forbidden Library and stockpile books of her mother's knowledge there.

It was the sea of knowledge that Echidna had spent her life amassing and cataloguing. When holed up in this room of books, it felt like her mother was embracing her.

Leaving aside the question of whether Beatrice always perceived it that way, she did obey Echidna's instructions.

If she neglected to immerse herself in her duties, the grief tormenting her heart would exceed what she could bear. She passed her days in the Library, oblivious to time, with the loss always plaguing her.

??? "Replicating souls... overwriting into vessels..."

Beatrice could not accurately determine just when it had started feeling hollow.

But once enough time passed that she no longer remembered the last time she had held a real conversation, an adult Roswaal began venturing into the Forbidden Library.

Roswaal: "I'll be iiiiiiiiiiiintruding once again today."

The skinny, unshaven young man limped into the room.

He used a cane, walked with a lumbering gait— the battle with the Warlock had destroyed his body, and his gate had lost the majority of its functions. Even attending to daily life was an arduous task for Roswaal now. Even so, after he had recovered some amount of strength, he would strain his inconvenient body and display his debilitated condition as he faced the bookshelves.

He was just skin and bones. His looks, known for their beauty, shone with no brilliance. His sunken yellow eyes alone blazed wet with insane ferocity.

Beatrice: “---Do whatever you want, in fact.”

Although, Beatrice did not wish to let anyone at all enter the Forbidden Library. Until That Person Echidna had mentioned arrived, this place was meant to be Beatrice’s Sanctuary, never to touched by the eyes of anyone.

But Roswaal was an exception. He alone was devoting himself to Echidna’s wishes, just like as Beatrice was, a companion who she had spent more than a little time with.

Roswaal’s wishes alone would permit Beatrice’s heart to open the Library.

It may have been Beatrice’s faint sense of camaraderie that determined the fate of Roswaal L. Mathers, and his family.

Roswaal would venture to the Library, sink into the sea of Echidna’s knowledge, and staked his entire lifetime on a search for something.

Beatrice did not know if his efforts ever wound up bearing fruit.

But the Roswaal L. Mathers who had studied with Beatrice under Echidna, ten years after Echidna and Beatrice had parted, at the time bordering on thirty years of age, lost his life. And his descendant inherited the mansion.

Roswaal: “Myyyyyyyyyy goodness, it is a pleasure to meet you, Beatrice-sama. My predecessor has told me stories about you.”

Beatrice: “...Roswaal’s dead, I suppose?”

Roswaal: “The previous Roswaal has passed away. But do be at ease. I, the current Roswaal L. Mathers, have inherited the debts towards your duties and your mother.”

With that said, the second Roswaal gave Beatrice a smile.

---With one of his eyes yellow, and one of his eyes blue.

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Nothing especially noteworthy happened after that.

The Mathers family continued to introduce themselves as Roswaal down the generations.

Though aware that they would do this to remember their respect for Beatrice's deceased mother, Echidna, Beatrice did not allow the Roswaals unlimited entry to the Forbidden Library.

As was natural. The only Roswaal to whom Beatrice could give special treatment was the first one. All the other Roswaals were imposters. She did accommodate them somewhat, given that they were providing the mansion needed to preserve the Forbidden Library, but nothing further.

From then on, Beatrice would only ever open the Library to That Person.

This awaited Person, and the guidepost her mother had given her, would force Beatrice into solitude for a very, very long time.

???: "Your power is magnificent. Please, grant it to me as my Spirit."

---Shut up. Get lost.

???: "You've been isolated here for so long. It's a horrendous fate. No matter who ordered you to do this, it's unforgivable."

---What would you know? About the precious duty my mother desired of me.

???: "Do you not think knowledge ought to be free? Can you imagine how many lives would be saved if the knowledge stored here was spread? You must already recognize it yourself."

---It has nothing to do with "how many". I am only looking to save a handful of people. And there's nobody I can save any more, except one person.

Four-hundred years.

Beatrice had not been seeking them out, had not permitted them in, but even so, many people visited the Forbidden Library. They each flung whatever words they'd fling at Beatrice, the Guardian of the Library, before inevitably demanding that the Library be opened.

Their proposals, propositions, and demands did sometimes sway Beatrice's heart.

She wondered countless times after the doors burst open, noticing the daylight spilling in from outside, whether it would finally be the arrival of That Person.

But, heedless to Beatrice's expectations, not a single one of them knew about That Person, and Beatrice's book mentioned nothing indicating that they were That Person either. So Beatrice cast away their words, their hands, everything they offered her, rejected them, and kept her mother's words close as she passed the time until today.

Over the years, resignation and disappointment had steadily overtaken Beatrice's heart. She wished that she had spoken with the first Roswaal more. Ever since she had lost the only person who shared her memories of Echidna, Beatrice had to face this concept called "eons" all by herself.

She had nobody to rely on. Her only option was stubbornness, and to seclude herself inside an impregnable, isolated barricade.

Over four-hundred years, her cage consequently took shape. Had it been a prison locked from the outside, or from the inside?

---Not even Beatrice could tell any more.

Puck: "Hey there, Betty. It's really been forever. It's me, Puck."

This inconceivable reunion was perhaps the only event that even minutely thawed Beatrice's frozen heart.

Beatrice: "B-Bubby? How come, you're here...?"

Puck: "This mansion's Roswaal went and swindled my daughter. So here I am with her. I was not expecting to find you here. I'm glad we got to see each other."

The name of this cat Spirit, bashfully washing his face with his paw, was Puck. Like Beatrice, he was an Artificial Spirit created by Echidna. He was the only entity who shared Beatrice's birth and circumstances, applicable as being her race.

The time that Beatrice and Puck had spent together four-hundred years ago had been short, but felt long. Puck had been created before Beatrice, and separated from Beatrice's group before the battle with the Warlock had begun, wandering the world in accordance with his purpose.

Beatrice had never thought that they would meet again, and practically considered him dead. She keenly felt how the reunion made her heart surge for the first time in four centuries.

But her joy only lasted an instant---

Puck: "After I left you, I spent about three centuries wandering the world before I finally found Lia. I'm not sure what you are waiting for, but I know your wishes will come true."

Beatrice: "Yes, yes, I suppose. But I envy Bubby, in fact. The role Mother gave Betty has..."

Puck: "Mother? Who was she, again?"

Beatrice: "-----"

Beatrice remembered how Puck had looked, not joking in the least, his head tilted in mystification. When Puck had left, he and Echidna formed several Contracts. Beatrice did not know their detailed terms, but Puck forgetting Echidna was obviously part of them.

Beatrice: "...No, disregard that, in fact. I'm glad I got to see you again, I suppose."

Puck: "Mhm, it's great, Betty."

Puck, having fulfilled his purpose and meaning in life, looked dazzling to Beatrice. But she knew that the topic she wanted to broach would only serve to impede his path.

So she kept quiet, smiling sadly as she wished her brother well with his future.

The unexpected reunion had given Beatrice slight joy, but heaps more agony, as her dead four-hundred years pressed down on her heart.

Comparing herself to Puck, who fulfilled his role, Beatrice was dumbstruck at the overwhelming disparity in their performance. And so she thought.

Beatrice: "...I am no longer able to ever laugh like you, Bubby."

Beatrice decided to get as little involved with Puck's beloved half-elf daughter as possible.

If she didn't, Beatrice would wind up taking out her pent-up resentment on the girl. She would do such wrong to her beloved brother's blameless, precious daughter that the situation would never be fixed.

Calling her heart to a stop and suppressing her emotions was her forte. She had spent four centuries constantly doing it through the sunrise, after the sunset, submerged in the moonlight.

Her specialty. A familiar deed. Lucid resignation. That kind of thing.

That kind of life— Which suddenly met an intruder.

Subaru: "M—make it painless ok."

Beatrice: "It's incredible that you're so persistent in your frivolity, in fact."

It had truly been forever since someone had entered the Forbidden Library without permission. While looking down at the boy, fallen on the floor from the Mana drain, Beatrice sighed and stroked her hair.

Using her space-connecting powers to send the boy into a labyrinth had been an act of simple revenge. Revenge for having to help in healing the boy when he had arrived wounded the previous day. Revenge for having to grant the request of the half-elf girl he saved.

Her plan had been to alleviate some of her sourness about the affair by pestering the boy.

Then he went around and defeated Door Crossing on his first attempt. He must not have noticed how shaken Beatrice had been on the inside.

Beatrice: "Not someone I want to have anything more to do with, I suppose."

Said Beatrice, after expelling him from the Library.

Not even Beatrice could determine how he had reached the Library in one attempt. Perhaps he possessed an affinity for Yin magic, and he had just happened to be on Beatrice's wavelength that day.

But even if he did have Yin affinity, he lacked any affinity as a magician.

He would only be staying for a few days. With that thought, Beatrice managed to ignore the uncomfortable strain in her chest.

Puck: "Betty. Were you mean to him? Come on, don't do that. He helped Lia, so you better give him a real apology."

Puck showed up in the Library the next morning to scold Beatrice for her actions, and now she had to confront the boy she had just decided she would stop having anything to do with.

Subaru: "She shows up, and what the hell does this loli start saying?"

Beatrice: "What is that word, I suppose. I've never heard it before, and it still disgusts me, in fact."

Subaru: "It means «too young to go down their route». Besides, I'm not really into younger girls."

Beatrice: "...Your extensive discourtesy to Betty goes around and becomes pitiable, in fact."

Tit-for-tat.

She did not intend to apologize anyway, but this conversation had completely eliminated any urge.

Beatrice passed breakfast in silence, saw Puck's rather resigned expression, and breathed a sigh of relief. It seemed like he had forgiven her. In exchange, it wound up that the boy would be staying in the mansion for the long-term.

Beatrice's desire to curse the situation seriously intensified, and she decided to excuse herself and return to the Library. The mansion came with complex circumstances and history anyway, and it was presently in a state of emergency, too.

This gutless boy would give up before long. All Beatrice had to do was to endure until that happened.

Subaru: "Hey, Beatrice. Done with work so here I am to hang out."

Completely oblivious to Beatrice's thoughts, the boy came parading into the Library while looking like a nitwit, annoying Beatrice even though she had not asked for any of this, and just kept doing it whenever he found time to spare.

Beatrice could only sit there, stunned at his impudence.

There had been others qualified to enter the Library without Beatrice's permission. But they had all been seeking the Library's knowledge, or seeking the powerful Spirit Beatrice. The second they opened their mouths, requests to liberate the knowledge would spill out. Or requests to Contract with Beatrice. Always.

Subaru: "Beatrice--- Mind if I pull your drills and make them sproioioioing everywhere?"

Beatrice: "Are you trying to die, I suppose?"

Just when it looked like he was about to say something serious, the same crap as usual came out. He had been somewhat desiccated in his first few days after waking up and gaining employment in the mansion, but after that, his overly-familiar attitude was off the charts.

...That was what Beatrice thought, when suddenly.

Subaru: "I'm stuck with no way out. Completely upfront, I'm looking for your help."

---He noticed the first signs of the Witchbeast affair in the forest surrounding the mansion.

With his body bathed in a Witchbeast's curse, discussing de-cursing and potential origins of the curse with Beatrice, she felt that there was something different about him compared to before. And she simultaneously noticed.

The Yin power she perceived from him, and its somewhat crooked manner of peaking.

The Witchbeast affair ended without being any of Beatrice's concern, he apparently resolved his differences with the maid sisters, and was welcomed in as a true member of the mansion.

He then went around being his jolly self, pestering her with an attitude even more over-familiar than before, and there was that one delicious episode among others about his mystery condiment called mayonnaise, all while Beatrice began meditating on an impossible fantasy.

—A boy who showed no great interest in the knowledge, or in Beatrice's power. Could he be the one who Beatrice had been waiting for?

That suspicion was baseless, continuous, and exhausted her. But when she tried to deem it as a legitimate theory, she thwarted herself by opening her blank book of prophecy. Being that the prophetic text said nothing, this boy could not be Beatrice's awaited That Person. And he was lacking in too many ways to be Beatrice's awaited one anyway.

First, his eyes were nasty. His attitude too. He was no man of culture, lacking refinement, and had short legs. He regarded something else as more important than Beatrice, and was not gentle with her.

In fact, she was unable to find any good point about him. Her mind was boggled as to what the half-elf girl and blue-haired maid found so appealing.

There was nothing good about him, so why couldn't he just be uniformly disliked and alone? If he was, then when he showed up in the Library, she wouldn't hesitate to change the way she interacted with him a little.

That was what she had sometimes thought, and yet.

Roswaal: "Beatrice. I'm thinking to invite Emilia-sama and Subaru-kun to Sanctuary."

That was what Roswaal, after returning from the Capital, told Beatrice.

A variety of questions whizzed through Beatrice's mind, her eyes wide. But Roswaal silenced Beatrice's queries with a single action. He stroked the cover of the prophetic book in his hands.

Roswaal: "...Do you understand? Beatrice."

Beatrice: "I... I, do understand, in fact. Do whatever you wish, I suppose."

Beatrice could say nothing else.

After Roswaal turned his back to her, and she learned that he was leaving for Sanctuary in advance, Beatrice decided that she would hole up in the Forbidden Library and go without seeing anyone.

The writ of Roswaal's Gospel was demanding contact with Sanctuary.

Beatrice did start having hopes for her own Gospel after hearing that. But her prophecy book contained endless pages of pure solid white as always, abandoning her heart in a wasteland.

Beatrice knew what came of Ryuzu Meyer's sacrifice.

She also knew that the place had gone without being liberated for four centuries. And that people diverged from demi-human races were held inside there, awaiting freedom.

And that it was a barrier the half-elf girl needed to overcome if she was aspiring for the throne.

—But what would happen to Ryuzu Meyer's sacrifice if the place was freed?

To Beatrice's feelings of powerless about being unable to save Ryuzu Meyer? To her overwhelming sense of loss that had triggered her parting with Echidna?

Her emotions had nowhere to go. Sensing that things that had been supposedly frozen had begun to pulse again, Beatrice knew that the end to her fate was truly coming.

Beatrice did not know the details of what had happened outside the mansion.

The boy returned from the Capital with a memento of someone dear from Beatrice's memories. Seeing it, feeling that the world had left her behind once again, Beatrice saw the boy's group off as they left for Sanctuary.

And, thinking that what they would bring back from Sanctuary would be her answer, Beatrice gave up.

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Beatrice: "And so Betty has decided, in fact...!"

Before they could bring back her answer, Beatrice had sensed deadly violence whipping through the mansion. Once she realized what was causing it, Beatrice understood that fate had truly deserted her.

Beatrice: "I won't break my promise to Mother... But it is meaningless to spend any more time in this emptiness, I suppose!"

That Person would never come. But she could not stop waiting.

Meaning that Beatrice needed someone to steal the option to wait from her.

If that meant losing her life, then she would offer it without any hesitation. If there had been someone, anyone, who she felt she could put even a little bit of her trust regarding this duty, then she could believe that her final wish would be granted.

So when the boy, when Natsuki Subaru, burst into the Forbidden Library this night, Beatrice's heart had been moved with more emotion than she could even express. It had felt like fate, which had never once attempted to give Beatrice's mind solace, had finally rewarded her.

If his hands would take her life and make her defy the promise, then even that would be---

Subaru: "I'm taking you out of here, Beatrice--- I'm dragging you out into the sunshine, where we'll play until your dress is caked completely brown with mud."

---And he said this.

Beatrice: "Unwanted meddling, I suppose. Nobody asked for you to do that, in fact."

---She did not understand. What was he saying?

He had never, not even once, behaved anything like That Person before. He had never snatched her Gospel away and told her, "Sorry for the wait".

Subaru: "Stop getting thrown around by a blank book and a four-hundred-year-old promise--- Be the one who chooses what you want to do, Beatrice."

Beatrice: "-----"

---So then, why was he, after all this time, disrupting Beatrice's heart after she had already steeled her resolve?

"I'm meeting my end", had been the only thought in her head. She had looked upon the boy, upon his return, and hoped she would end by his hands.

But he had been trying to show her a future that diverged from her hopes.

This was what she desired.

The heart that could desire this hope had, over four-hundred years of time, long ago withered to nothing.

Beatrice: “I—if, you... were That Person...”

...That had been what it was supposed to be, but while listening to the boy’s indignant speech, something changed in Beatrice’s heart.

Her slumbering emotions shook like flowers taking bloom after winter. She raised her head. There would be no taking this statement back, once she said it.

She was dispelling her four-hundred year obsession with her mother’s binding words, and now clinging to something entirely unrelated and new.

And though she understood that, from her mouth, the decisive words—

Beatrice: “Will... you be Betty’s That Person?”

Subaru: “Are you stupid? —Of course I wouldn’t be this weird mysterious That Person of yours.”

The instant he said it, his expression somewhat mocking, Beatrice’s newly-budded hopes had been betrayed.

She did not really remember what had happened afterwards, as she surrendered herself to anger and expelled him from the room.

But she did know that she had said something she could not take back, and before it could develop into something that could not be taken back, was snuffed out.

Beatrice: “———”

What an utter clown she was.

This meant that she had done nothing more than betray her Mother's instructions. And her betrayal had meant that she was barred from procuring results, degrading Beatrice's pledge into something horrendously cheap.

Beatrice: "I'm exhausted, I suppose..."

And so, all she had to do was let things proceed as she had originally intended.

It had been a mistake to consider taking his hand in the first place. He was not the owner of a heart so valiant that they could soil their hands for the sake of another.

He was someone like Beatrice, constantly fretting about trivial things, indecisive and unsure, constantly piling excuses upon excuses, the owner of a weak heart.

And so the death to end Beatrice would come in a different---

Subaru: "Finally back! Hey, stupid. Stop throwing people out halfway through conversations. Now just listen to me and--"

Beatrice: "----!"

Subaru: "Plot!?"

Butting in to Beatrice's contemplations, the boy burst back into the Forbidden Library.

The instant she saw the boy, edging on speaking something more, Beatrice's emotions seethed and she blasted him away with a pulse of magic.

She watched him fail to endure it, shooting out of the Library as the doors slam shut.

Their conversation had disintegrated, capped off with his decisive comment, and still. Just how shameless was he?

Beatrice could not comprehend how he could leave her with that statement, going on to show up so brazenly. She put her hand to her chest to deal with her irritation, let out a sigh, and---

Subaru: “How about cutting this out! Is this you throwing a tantrum!? If you’re gonna resort to violence first thing, the conversation’s not going any—”

Beatrice: “You cut it out, in fact!”

Subaru: “Dua!”

The higher grade of magical pulse impacted his head, proceeding down to batter his torso.

Once she confirmed that the screaming, tumbling boy struck the wall outside the door, the Library once again severed its connection to the hallway.

She could not believe his persistence. Was he ignorant to the concept of “giving up”? Or did he not realize how deeply his thoughtless words had wounded Beatrice’s heart? Whichever it was, the boy was continuously rejecting Door Crossing’s goodbye.

Beatrice: “...This is truly no joke, I suppose.”

With that irritated mutter, Beatrice dragged the stepladder over from the back of the room, and took her usual position opposite the door. She cradled her book of prophecy in her arms as she glared at the entrance.

—The boy would be belting that door open once again.

With his selfish logic and inconsiderate sales pitch, he would come. Times upon times upon times, she would reject him and cast him away.

Because he was not That Person.

Because he himself had forfeited his right to take Beatrice out of here. And so Beatrice would never, ever leave here.

She merely had to end here, alongside her unfulfilled promise. Because that was the only thing that would now grant Beatrice solace.

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Having been blasted out of the room, Subaru crashed head-first into a wall, causing his breathing to halt upon impact.

This was his sixth time being thrown out of the Library after his first failure in persuading Beatrice. He felt that all these repeated blasts in such a short timeframe had made him better at catching himself when dealing with invisible attacks.

But Beatrice's magic pulses seemed as if they were beginning to feel out how intense they could get without seriously damaging Subaru, meaning he absolutely must not slack.

Subaru: "This isn't the time to be polishing your stupid magic, shit! She's not listening..."

Wiping away his sweat with his sleeve, Subaru demanded his knees bring him to his feet.

He had been running constantly since yesterday, had blood shed and broken bones mended, meaning he was physically exhausted. The utter fatigue made his vision hazy, and the only thing keeping him moving was willpower.

Subaru: "The fire's gonna be spreading for real around now..."

Subaru kept himself low, turning his head this way and that, clicking his tongue, for fatigue alone did not explain his poor vision.

The fire that had killed the massive Witchbeast was steadily engulfing the whole mansion. The lower floor of the main block was nigh completely drowned in flame, and he could see plumes of smoke wafting from the eastern and western wings too.

The spreading fire had driven most of the Witchbeasts out of the mansion, so there were no monsters to block Subaru's path as he ran around. But the building was heating up like an oven, its temperature rising. His sweat was evaporating swiftly, his singed flesh bordering on charring at any moment. The building would start collapsing before long, and Subaru's fate would drown to nothing in the fire.

Before that could happen, he needed to fulfil his goal and flee here with Beatrice. But Beatrice's heart remained stubbornly closed.

Subaru: “It does help that the mansion fire’s cutting down the number of doors, but...”

That was really the only conceivable benefit of the blaze.

Door Crossing only operated on the mansion’s functional doors. So open doors or burned doors would not apply. The further the fire spread, the fewer doors would potentially lead to the Library.

Subaru: “That said, the fire’s gonna cook me before the number of doors is cut down.”

And he did not even want to wonder about what would happen if all the mansion’s doors were to burn away. Subaru did not know specifically how Beatrice’s Door Crossing linked spaces to one another. The incineration of the mansion could potentially turn Beatrice’s Forbidden Library into a permanently isolated subspace.

There was only one place outside the mansion that Subaru could think as a potential connection for Door Crossing, the laboratory with Ryuzu Meyer’s sleeping crystal, but—

Subaru: “Would she link the mansion to there in her current mental state...?”

Beatrice’s Door Crossing had sent Subaru to Sanctuary once before. Subaru had speculated on why this irregular event occurred.

Beatrice’s emotions had detonated and she forcibly expelled Subaru from the Forbidden Library. Her intentions strayed as she focused intensely on a farewell— and so her Door Crossing consequently sent Subaru to the laboratory. That was his idea.

That location was a symbol of sad and painful farewell for Beatrice. So perhaps that was why Subaru had been sent to Sanctuary back then.

Making it inconceivable that Beatrice’s Door Crossing would link to the laboratory now. Beatrice was not focusing on “farewell”, she is focusing on “end”. If she lost her connection to the world, the mansion, Beatrice would reach her end. To Subaru, his gut told him that Beatrice’s ultimate decision would be just that.

Subaru: “I’m not letting you ever end like that!”

Taking a deep breath, Subaru broke into a run while keeping low to the ground.

He left the previous door open and searched for the next door, batting away smoke as he proceeded deeper into the mansion.

He heard the constant crackling of the building's structure burning in the inferno. His skin was scorched and the boiling air threatened to sear his eyes. He endured both with a grimace. The smoke slipping into his nose brought him near to choking, when he discovered a yet-unopened door and pounced for the doorknob.

The blazing doorknob irradiated heat, searing Subaru's hand. Already his palms were atrocious with many ugly burns. He was quite used to gritting his teeth in agony.

With a stabbing pain piercing through his temples, he kicked the door open.

Subaru: "-----"

He tumbled into the room with its cloying stench of ancient books. He opened his mouth wide, taking a deep breath having fallen face-up, and he glared at the dim ceiling above.

A familiar atmosphere, and rage prickling at his skin--- It was definitely the Forbidden Library.

Beatrice: "You again, simply incorrigible...!"

Subaru: "Haaaaa! Of course I'm back! I'm coming here however many times it takes to kidnap you. If you don't like it, then let me drag you out of here right now! Then that'll be the end of these exchanges!"

Beatrice: "Enough of your useless chatter, I suppose! I know that the mansion is burning, in fact! If you don't flee outside immediately, you will simply burn to death in the fire, I suppose!"

Subaru jerked himself up, his breathing ragged as he glared at Beatrice. She remained seated on the stepladder, her round eyes as sharp as they could get as she bared her rage at Subaru.

For an instant, slight emotion dashed along the edge of those eyes, and Beatrice's lips trembled.

Beatrice: "Or... Do you mean to burn dead with the mansion and Betty?"

Subaru: "Are you stupid! After everything I've said, you still don't get it!? I'm not thinking of dying with you at all! I'm here to drag you out without you dying!"

Beatrice: “—! Selfish without fail, I suppose! Leave!”

Subaru stood up, pouncing for a bookcase to bide through the first magic pulse.

He felt the gale battering him, and then a second pulse that utterly drained him of energy. He glanced up to find Beatrice with her left hand raised toward the ceiling, her face twisted in anguish as she forced herself to smile.

Beatrice: “I robbed you of Mana, in fact. You must remember this sensation, I suppose.”

Subaru: “You, little...”

Beatrice: “Should your grip on the bookshelf slacken, that would be the end, in fact. Stop involving yourself with me, I suppose!”

The moment his knees started to give out, the third pulse of magic struck Subaru from head-on. An invisible wall of force crashed into him. Unable to support himself, Subaru was again pushed toward the door, proceeding to tumble and fly out the—

Subaru: “Nnngah!”

—Reaching his limbs out as far as he could, Subaru managed to catch himself on the door.

His limbs were overrun with pain, and experience told him that his arms were fractured or possibly even broken. He gritted his teeth, forcing himself to ignore it.

Beatrice: “Wh—”

Subaru: “Experience it too many times, and even I can learn how to get through. So want to comply to my efforts and start getting in the mood to talk?”

Beatrice: “You’ve lost your chance to speak with Betty, in fact. By your own actions, you are the one who squandered it, I suppose... Why do you not understand that, in fact!?”

Subaru: “I don’t get it, no. Because you’re actually guilty for that as well, aren’t you?”

His hand against the door, Subaru got to his feet and wiped away the blood dripping from his open lip.

He watched how Beatrice's brows furrowed in utter confusion, his face slipping into a wry smile.

Beatrice: "What's so funny, I suppose?"

Subaru: "I just confirmed that my consecutive assault is not fruitless. If you mean to seriously reject me, stop with the finicky crap and just blast me away. You have the power for that. It'd be so much quicker to just do that."

Beatrice: "...You are telling Betty to kill you."

Subaru: "Not that you can. That was me being a jerk. Sorry. But if you're seriously rejecting me, then there should be easier ways for you to do it."

Beatrice, bordering on tears, had refused to kill Subaru before.

Subaru had not advanced to a stage where he could understand what her sentiment or reasoning had been back then. So all he had was speculation, assembled from what fragments of her past Subaru knew. He had his suspicions, and still asked that question, astounding himself with how mean-spirited he truly was.

But if he did not ask it, Beatrice would not realize.

Realize the contradiction between her thoughts and actions, and the fact of Subaru's presence here.

Subaru: "If you seriously do not want to see me, then seclude yourself in the Library, Beatrice."

Beatrice: "What... are you... Betty has not taken a single step out of the Forbidden Library, in fact. But you are forcing yourself in of your own accord, and...!"

Subaru: "Nope, that's incorrect. If you were serious about holing up in here alone, there'd be no goddamn way I'd reach the place so many times in such a short time span. Your rejection's just superficial."

Beatrice: "That! Is because... Yes, is because you are enacting the method to cheat Door Crossing, in fact. And the mansion is burning, reducing the number of doors..."

Stuck for words, Beatrice's rebuttal trailed off to a weak end.

Subaru's statement had made her doubt herself. And even if that was not the case, Beatrice had lost the pillar that had kept her standing through these four-hundred years, and was currently unstable.

She could no longer tell if Subaru's words were right, or if her emotions were right.

Subaru: "-----"

And honestly, Subaru did not know either. He had no clue why he had managed to reach Beatrice's Forbidden Library so unflinching in this short timeframe.

It could be due to the mansion's doors burning away, leaving him with fewer options. Or maybe the emergency situation was prompting his Yin abilities to showcase absurd strength, and that was letting him defeat Door Crossing. It might be that Subaru was actually correct, that Beatrice was not truly rejecting him, and the doors of Door Crossing were open to him.

Subaru wished that the latter was true.

But the reality was insignificant. What Natsuki Subaru needed to do here, now, was to secure any possibility of bringing Beatrice out.

Beatrice: "You... you! Are not Betty's That Person!"

Unable to bear it, Beatrice yelled, clutching at her skirt. She had given up on thinking as she appealed to Subaru, howling.

Beatrice: "You said you weren't, in fact! You... you said you weren't, I suppose. If you were That Person... even if you said it as a lie, Betty would have believed you. Even knowing it was a lie, all I could've done was believe you, in fact."

Subaru: "Beatrice..."

Beatrice: "But you said you weren't, I suppose. Said you weren't, said I was stupid, in fact. Why yes, I suppose. You're correct, in fact. Betty is stupid, a stupid imbecile, who even now cannot disregard a promise from four centuries ago... and so! Nothing you say will change that it is over, I suppose!"

Choosing rejection, an invisible wind whipped around the shouting Beatrice.

The torrent of magic made her dress, her long hair flutter, filling the Library with a tense and turbulent air. Subaru sensed that this was the greatest gale yet, his body shuddering in terror at the coming strike.

His cowering heart wanted him to retreat, to flee outside the door.

But he managed to suppress the urge, bit deeper into his lip, and raised his head. To tell what must be told.

Subaru: “I...”

Beatrice: “-----”

Subaru: “I am not That Person. I’ll say it however many times. Your long-awaited prince isn’t coming on his white steed. Not to the end, not ever!”

Beatrice: “—! Then! Betty shall simply rot here, in fact!”

Subaru: “Not happening. I’m not letting you choose that. I will come back and say this however many times it takes for you to change your mind. That Person isn’t coming. You cannot keep your promise— But you will not be allowed to die.”

Beatrice: “I just... hate you so much, I suppose!!”

With that, Beatrice’s emotions exploded. The torrent of magic changed form as it targeted a single goal, white light dominating everything in Subaru’s vision.

He did not even have time to feel the gust of wind.

The shockwave pounded Subaru through his front and out his back, scrambling all the innards he had. His blood flowed backwards as everything inside him was wrung out his pores, the pain agonizing.

His eyes spun, he lost his sense of balance, felt overwhelming vertigo, became devoid of all perception of sound and smell and light. This would be what humans would call dying.

—But, Natsuki Subaru knows.

Subaru: “—What are you doing?”

Withstanding a nausea so intense his organs could spill out his mouth, Subaru forced himself to speak so that his weakness would be imperceptible.

The world existed underfoot, and the moment he recognized that fact, he steadily regained his perception. He had his limbs, had his head, his organs were not spilling out his mouth, his soul had not shed its vessel.

So what? Same thing as usual, just a near-death experience. Natsuki Subaru was experienced enough to know. This was not death.

Beatrice: “You are, joking, in fact...”

His vision swayed, blurry and unstable. Regaining enough focus to somehow recognize that he was inside the Library, he gazed at the girl in front of him, her arms spread wide as if she was witnessing something unbelievable.

It was Beatrice.

Not even she could comprehend his failure to die, and the preservation of his fundamental shape.

But there was nothing strange about it. Subaru had known it would turn out like this. It was inconceivable that Beatrice would let herself kill Subaru.

Subaru: “Beatrice...”

Beatrice: “———”

His consciousness was hazy. But willpower allowed him to anchor his nearly broken spirit.

The girl before him was wavering. She could not comprehend her own self, unable to fully reject him, as she looked at a ragged Subaru in terror.

Suspecting that his voice would reach her in this instant, he scrambled to assemble his waning consciousness, and spoke.

Subaru: “I’m, not... That Person of yours...”

Beatrice: “———”

Subaru: “But.”

Those repeated upon repeated rejections had put Beatrice on the verge of tears.

The conversation would usually end here. Before it could, however, before Beatrice’s emotions could swell to their limit, Subaru spoke.

Subaru: “I... want to be with you, Beatrice.”

Beatrice: “———!”

Subaru: “You are kind, and I want to be by your side so you will not be sad.”

Beatrice: “Ah... guh...”

Beatrice’s expression twisted.

It was as though she was suppressing fury, as though she was suppressing tears, as though she was struggling to keep some utterly undocumented emotion from showing on her face.

But she swallowed her words, sighed a ragged sigh, and picked up the book on the stepladder. She flipped through the pages, wrested through the pages, her fingers scrunching the paper, then let out a quiet whine. And.

Subaru: “—What?”

Before Beatrice could take any action, Subaru’s vision warped. It had nothing to do with his hazy consciousness or deficient blood. It was a matter of reality.

The Forbidden Library was starting to bend in front of Subaru.

The ground around him warped, the bookshelves losing their balance as they toppled down one after another. Books fell messily to the floor, instantly drowning the ground in a sea of tomes.

Even still, the world continues to bended.

The ground beneath Subaru's feet distorted too, undulating like a bellows, preventing him from maintaining his balance.

Subaru: "What... what's...!?"

Beatrice: "-----"

While clinging desperately to the door, Subaru looked at Beatrice.

He found that in this rippling room, Beatrice's surroundings alone were untouched. The stepladder she sat upon moved not an inch, supporting Beatrice's weight as she looked at Subaru.

Subaru: "—Ah."

Before Subaru could say anything, the ground beneath him tilted.

The floor under Subaru fissured open with a noise like the ripping of paper. A black space expanded from beneath the floor-tiles, and without a doubt, it was about to send him somewhere by methods other than Door Crossing.

She could even be imprisoning him in some non-existent, hyper-dimensional space.

Subaru: "—Shit."

It happened the moment he noticed the hole, taking a step back.

The world slanted in earnest, sending Subaru falling backwards following to gravity. The door's gaping mouth swallowed him, sending him back to the blazing mansion through Door Crossing.

Subaru: "H—hot!"

The heat of the wall he crashed into forced a wail out of him.

He raised his head, to find that he had been ejected into a hallway fully engulfed in flames. The only thing he managed to recognize was the fact that he was in the main wing. The flames singed him utterly as he looked at the door he had just exited, and, noticing that the door's lower half was already swallowed in flames, Subaru was stunned.

It was a miracle that Door Crossing had even worked. He did not think for a second that jumping at that door would bring him back to the Library.

Subaru: “Crap... If, this is the main wing...”

Then he might be able to find a functional door upstairs.

Vaguely aware he was not in the uppermost floor from the number of doors, Subaru decided to head for the stairway, engulfed in flames as it was. The smoke stung his eyes, tears welling over. His lungs burned with every breath, though he managed to keep the smog from snatching his consciousness by holding his jersey to his mouth.

Every minute counted. Like fuck he was actually going to reach the Library— No. It was not the time for whining.

He could not forget Beatrice’s expression at the end.

Subaru: “Stupid idiot, making that fucking face again...”

The numbness in his limbs caused by Beatrice’s magic pulse left his body. He dragged his body along, the thing more or less obeying his will, whittling at his soul as he ran for the end of the corridor.

Beatrice’s expression flickered through his mind. It was the same face he had seen in a previous loop.

When he and Beatrice had faced Elsa, and the woman took Beatrice’s life, after she had supposedly been defeated. When Beatrice had shoved him away to protect him, and had her stomach cleaved. Once she had seen Subaru was safe, her body wordlessly turned to particles of light.

Subaru had not forgotten her final expression from back then.

It had not been relief at having protected Subaru, nor joy at having obtained her desired death, but a grimace.

—It was the kind of expression that said “I don’t want to be alone”, obvious to anyone.

Subaru: “So like hell... like hell I’m gonna leave you on your own!”

With that, he leapt into the fire as he searched for escape.

He felt something squirming and wrong inside him, but the heat from his singed flesh and the pain from his burnt skin prevented him from focusing on it.

Were Subaru an objective witness to this, he would unwittingly recoil from how repulsive it was. Subaru, running through the fire with his pledge to bring out Beatrice, was wrapped by an overwhelming mass of black Miasma, embracing him almost like a protective vestment of shadow.

Oblivious to this, Subaru broke through the wall of flame and reached the stairway.

He exhaled raggedly, looked at the staircase above, and recognized that it was the second floor. He proceeded to climb the staircase, thinking to dash straight for the uppermost floor— When.

Subaru: “———”

He heard the noise of something wet being dragged across the ground, and looked down. The noise was coming from downstairs. His rationality told him that it was impossible.

All he could hear around him was the crackling and booming of the burning building.

The mansion was seconds away from collapse, and that sound came from the first floor of the main wing, where the inferno had started. Nothing should be moving down there. Having sprinted all through the mansion meant that Subaru understood the fire, from which even the Witchbeasts fled.

So the noise had to be a hallucination.

—But if it was, then what was that?

Subaru: “...No way.”

While dragging something along with it, a silhouette emerged from the flames.

It was destined for the upstairs as it climbed the staircase as Subaru just had, stopping at the landing between the first and second floor— and looked up as it noticed Subaru’s presence directly above it.

The silhouette was wearing black clothes, holding a black knife, and was a woman with black hair.

Subaru: “Elsa...?”

Elsa: “———”

The silhouette did not respond. But it definitely looked like the black-garbed woman Subaru knew.

Why was she here? Could Garfiel somehow have lost? If so, then Subaru’s battle—— Subaru’s battle to save everything, had ended in defeat, and——

Subaru: “No, I’m off...”

Just as those ideas started appearing in his mind, Subaru shook his head.

Subaru had to trust in Garfiel’s strength. Even if his opponent was strong, Subaru had been betting on Garfiel to win. Otto and Frederica had done everything they could to assist in evacuating Petra and Rem. Garfiel would likewise have done his absolute best as well.

How would Natsuki Subaru have possibly gotten this far without believing in his companions?

Subaru: “Garfiel shouldn’t lose. So, why are you...”

Believing in Garfiel’s valiant fight, Subaru flung words at the silhouette below him. This woman should not be here. What was behind her actions?

But just when he went to question her, Subaru noticed something. Or no, he was forced to notice.

Subaru: “——You’re not Elsa anymore, are you?”

The dark eyes looking up at Subaru shone with not a speck of light. They were so hollow and empty that it was unbelievable that those were eyeballs in those sockets.

The noise was coming from the crushed lower body of the silhouette, dragging along behind it. But the thing still acted like it was alive, which Subaru found incredibly repulsive.

Subaru did think that she had life force enough that she would not die, but she was still incapable of dying after all that destruction?

Subaru: “Though, this isn’t the time to be pitying her...!”

Even supposing she was incapable of dying, Subaru had no words of sympathy.

Given what Elsa had done before she died, sympathy would be lenient treatment even despite her state. That said, Subaru did not make a hobby of tormenting walking corpses. So he rationalized that she just needed to get caught in the mansion's collapse, and have the flames cremate her.

Subaru: "Get swallowed in the inferno. I'm leaving to get Beatr—"

Shaking his head, Subaru disregarded the silhouette and resolved himself to head upstairs.

Subaru: "—Huh?"

With a slight noise, the silhouette leapt.

Its mouth gaped open as it aimed for Subaru, swinging its wicked blade.

Subaru: "——"

The wind from the knife as it grazed past his nose made Subaru's lungs forget to breathe and heart forget to beat.

The thing had just tried to take Subaru's life, so natural that it may as well have been walking over to him.

But its strike just barely missed Subaru, instead shattering the floor before the tips of his toes.

The enemy had not been going on easy on him, its dead lower half had simply lacked the leg strength needed to pounce. Had it possessed said leg strength, that attack would have killed Subaru.

Subaru: "You've gotta be kidding!"

He promptly kicked the silhouette as it pitched forward before ascending the staircase. He dashed so intently that he forgot to breathe, glancing back at the shadow. The silhouette's head swayed from the kick and it jerked its limbs awkwardly to the ground like a marionette, then scuttling like a spider in pursuit of Subaru.

Subaru: "Are you joking!?"

He had called her a spider-woman before, but he had not thought she actually was one.

Stunned at her inhuman locomotion, Subaru soared to the top of the stairway. He imagined the silhouette pursuing him as he dove into the inferno of the third-floor hallway. In the very middle of the hall was the office. That room, being the sturdiest in the mansion, should still be generally undestroyed—

???: “—Ooooooh!!”

Subaru: “Daaaaah!?”

Intercepting Subaru as he leapt into the blaze, a lion-headed Witchbeast roared.

Having lost its mane, and with over half of its body burned grotesquely, this was unmistakably the Witchbeast that Subaru’s team had supposedly killed in the dining room.

Apparently the near-dead beast had returned to this door in adherence with its master’s orders. Meaning that Subaru was presently a moth darting into a flame. An unanticipated meeting amidst fire. The pun worked disgustingly well.

The half-burnt Witchbeast swung its foreleg what with those giant claws. The attack minced the wall, closing in to strike Subaru’s neck, more than strong enough to mow Subaru down easier than a weed despite the beast’s moribund state.

Subaru: “You’re one-trick ponies!”

But Subaru dodged by ducking low and diving forward.

Subaru had learned from the other Witchbeasts that they often aimed for their prey’s vitals. Judging that the beast would definitely aim for the head, Subaru dove into a forward roll to slip past the beast’s flank.

This beast, fully capable of devouring Subaru in one gulp, roared in rage as it attempted to readjust itself and face Subaru. But things would not be that easy.

Guiltylaw: “—Ooooh!!”

In pursuit of Subaru, the skittering silhouette bared its fangs at the half-dead Witchbeast.

The beast, its back turned, was slow to react as the silhouette's flourished blade showered a slash down upon it. The beast's rear left leg was amputated at the joint, blood pouring from the crooked wound as the creature's shrieks echoed through the corridor.

The beast whipped its snakelike tail, striking for the silhouette that crawled across the ground.

The silhouette avoided it nightmarishly, maneuvering beyond human capacity to parry the beast's tail away with its blade, stabbed its knife into the beast's open wound, and bore deep into the injury.

Subaru listened the earsplitting screech resound as he headed for the office's door, certain not to let the opportunity escape.

He kicked the record room's door open on his way, but it failed to lead to the Library, instead leading only to time loss. The beast and silhouette were still fighting behind him, but being that the only howls being heard came from the beast, it was obvious how the scales were tipping.

Subaru: "Beatrice!"

Having reached the office, Subaru prayed to himself as he opened the door. If the Library appeared before him, he could say goodbye to the monster battle. But what cruelly appeared was merely the sight of the disheveled office.

Subaru: "Shit... Then this wasn't it!"

Practically illustrating the strength of Beatrice's rejection, the office diverged from Subaru's wishes. He could no longer search for other doors, or return to the lower floors of the burning mansion. If there were any potential doors left, it would be---

Subaru: "The hidden passage..."

It was difficult to call the hidden passage, which opened via a mechanism, a door. The passage was opened via a sliding bookcase, and it was rather unlikely that passing through its entrance would lead him to the Forbidden Library.

If there were any other doors left, they would be deeper inside the passage.

Subaru: "There should be a door midway through the passage that opens to a small room... But..."

In a previous loop, Elsa had ambushed him from beyond that door.

But he did not know if that door fell within Door Crossing's area of effect. And above all, Subaru had to think that this was Beatrice's doing, leading him from door to door to try and expel him from the mansion through the hidden passage.

She may be aware of the mansion's current state, resolving to lead Subaru down a route that would grant him survival.

In that case, the hidden passage may not even lead to the Forbidden Library.

He could be led outside the mansion, to the mountain cabin at the end of the escape tunnel, and forever lose his chance to save Beatrice.

Subaru: "—Not giving me any time to think!"

Subaru heard the beast's death wail as the decisive blow was struck.

The Witchbeast, which had unwittingly put in a valiant fight to buy Subaru time, had most likely died for real to Elsa's silhouette.

With a shake of his head, Subaru dove into the hidden passage.

A spiral staircase lengthy enough to reach the mansion's underground welcomed him— and it seemed that the inferno had reached even this tunnel, the heat and smoke preventing anyone from doing anything here.

Subaru put his hand to his chest to cope with the aching, steeling his resolve as he sped straight down the staircase. Descending right after ascending. The heat charred him, and just imagining what color his skin must be made for a terrifying thought.

After eventually reaching the end of the staircase, Subaru peered into the darkness of the passage, his breathing ragged. It seemed like the smoke had been leaking in from a gap in the stairway wall, for he saw no effects of heat or fire in the subterranean passage.

Instead of the threat of burning, Subaru had to deal with fumbling in pitch darkness.

He walked in deeper for another ten or so meters before reaching a somewhat wider space, finding the door to the small room he's looking for, and stopped.

Subaru: "Here..."

Subaru had never gone deeper into the hidden passage than this door. He did not know if any other doors existed beyond this door. Meaning that this was potentially Subaru's last chance for a door to lead to Beatrice. And if this place were to function as a proper hidden passage---

Subaru: "-----"

Shaking his head to dispel his weakness of heart, Subaru reached for the doorknob.

If Beatrice had lead Subaru here with intention for him to survive, then his chances here were poor. Subaru fearfully touched the doorknob---

Subaru: "Hooo! This door's another..."

Crying in pain as his hand burned, Subaru grimaced and glared at the door. Its response, as if it had reflected Subaru's heart, caused a wave of foreboding to surge up in him and--- He noticed it.

Subaru: "The doorknob's hot...?"

While the underground passage may be heated, there were no signs of fire. The smoke and heat had likely been leaking in through a gap in the stonework that made up the staircase. If Subaru's speculation were correct, then it was inconceivable that the door would be so hot.

The door was hot enough that one would have to wonder if it had indeed been seared by flames.

Subaru: "...Beatrice. If you can hear this, please listen."

Taking care not to touch the door, Subaru looked slightly upwards and muttered. Believing that his voice would reach the absent girl.

Subaru: "Did you lead me here? If you did, knowing that the only way out is through this hidden passage, then honestly I'm speechless at what a schemer you are."

Beatrice's tactics to lead Subaru this far were indeed quite considerable.

The encounter with Elsa's shadow and the Witchbeast surely had nothing to do with Beatrice, but she had definitely led Subaru here by the nose. If he proceeded to open this door and reach the mountain cabin, Beatrice's plans would likely be fulfilled.

Subaru: "But apparently things won't go so smoothly. I could open this door, but I will not manage to escape how you want me to. This isn't me being stubborn and insisting that I don't want to run away, okay? I'm at least half in that mood, yes, but... it's something more urgent."

Addressing someone who might not even be listening, Subaru smoothly strung along word after word. He tapped his nails against the door blocking the way before him and sighed.

Subaru: "If I open this door, I will probably die. You and the others might not notice this, but, right now, that's the situation on the other side of this door. It's hard to explain verbally... but I understand the soul of science. I can tell."

Setting aside the failure in the dining room, Subaru's twenty-first-century knowledge was howling at him. This door Subaru was presently looking at was a door commonly found during fire-related emergencies, and must not be touched.

No joke at all, Subaru's life was in danger. What happened next was up to whether Beatrice was listening. And if she was, would she believe what he was saying?

Subaru: "Beatrice. I am going to open the door— I am leaving it up to you to decide how to judge my words."

Although aware that the thing before him was a threat to his life, Subaru's heart was rather calm. It was not that his nerves had been steeled, or that he had resolved himself.

Rather, it was that he could calmly entrust his life to another. After all—

Subaru: "—Beatrice, I trust you."

With his hand burning in pain, Subaru flung open the door. And—

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Rather than going down the spiral staircase, the shadow reached the bottom via something closer to plummeting.

Shadow: “-----”

The blood flowing from the shadow was clouded like muddy water, its visage as it dragged its crushed legs along so ghastly it did not look like it belonged to this world. With a wicked black blade in its right hand, and the dead Witchbeast’s heart in its left, the shadow clenched its fist to crush the organ as it proceeded deeper down the passage.

The skulking shadow had a human’s shape, but not even itself could determine whether it possessed human will or not. Its body had been destroyed so thoroughly that it could function, its life whittled such that it could not revive, and it had already exhausted the absolute dregs of its vitality as a shadow.

If you asked how the silhouette could regardless be moving around like this, then the shadow would respond— because, before it had become a shadow, its personality had been just that intensely tenacious.

The shadow eventually, silently, reached the deepest part of the passage.

The shadow lacked a will, and possessed no goal other than to corner anything moving and reap their lives. Sensing that its mark had passed this place, the shadow gave an easy flourish of its wicked blade.

Shadow: “-----”

With a clunk, the door in front of the shadow split apart. The shadow kicked the door’s debris aside, and moved to peer into the darkness beyond.

Shadow: “-----”

A slight wind blew by, making the shadow feel as if they were being sucked into the darkness. White smoke overflowed from deep in the darkness, a haze beginning to form before the shadow.

And immediately after— oxygen flowed into the room where incomplete combustion had occurred, mingling with the traces of the fire, instantly superheating and bursting out of the room.

Backdraft.

There was no way that the shadow, a dimwitted mass moving only to destroy, could have anticipated the explosive phenomenon.

Shadow: “-----”

The burst of flames engulfed the shadow, hellfire burning its body to nothing.

The shadow’s body had lost the means to either restore or revive itself, waiting only to rot, when cremating fires enveloped it, carbonization not even being an apt enough concept to describe it, as the blaze peaked instantly hotter— and burned it to nothing.

The fire’s momentum did not stop with merely the shadow as it proceeded to zoom through the underground passage, transforming the spiral staircase into a sea of searing heat. Then, blowing into the office to explode for even greater inferno.

—The Roswaal mansion now truly collapsed, meeting its end.

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Seeing how the Forbidden Library had changed, Subaru swallowed his breath.

Fissures ran through the floor near the entryway, the hole to the hyper-dimensional space still alive and well. The fallen bookcases had no hopes of recovery, and in fact a portion of the room was up in flames.

The situation in the Roswaal mansion had started affecting the Forbidden Library too.

Subaru: “-----”

But, noticing the gaze fixed upon him, Subaru suppressed his shock and changed his gears. For now, he would focus everything on only one single girl.

—For this, this was surely his last chance.

Beatrice: “You’re an idiot, in fact...”

Subaru: “That’s seriously the first thing you say?”

Beatrice: “Well you are, I suppose. Betty put in so much effort so that you might escape, then you waste the opportunity, and come back, in fact. The mansion no longer has any doors, I suppose. The Forbidden Library has caught aflame too, in fact.”

She was right.

The fire had spread to some of the fallen bookcases, turning the beloved books one-by-one into ash. The entire place was flammable. It was going to burn down in a flash.

Subaru: “Which means this will be the end both for me and for you.”

Beatrice: “Yes. It’s the end, I suppose. There is not much that Betty desires any longer. The fire has spread to the knowledge destined for That Person, which completely goes against the promise, I suppose.”

Subaru: “Does it. Then, I want you to listen to my final speech.”

Beatrice’s empty eyes looked at Subaru. She said nothing to encourage or refuse him, but the reaction probably meant that she was at least willing to listen. Subaru gave her a nod, and took a small breath.

The words he had not managed to tell her before, at their previous parting. Right now, he would tell her everything he wished to tell, in full.

Subaru: “Beatrice— Help me.”

Beatrice: “...Huh?”

Assertion, spoken with chest held high.

Shock dashed through Beatrice’s eyes in response to sooty-faced Subaru’s declaration. She had surely attempted to imagine what he would say.

While drawing near to her unavoidable end, Beatrice had definitely run many simulations of what words Subaru would approach her with.

“I want to save you, I won’t let you be alone”. Perhaps those manly words, and the cool greeting she had expected from That Person, were what she had been waiting for.

But if Subaru was to communicate his true feelings, it was impossible for him to use such statements.

Subaru: “So I have been considering how I’ve been saying this cool stuff like, «I’m bringing you out of isolation», or «I’m going to save you». Really, that’s all I could come up with while riding off momentum to get through the situation. So, I’ve been sincerely thinking. What is it I think of you? What do I think of you, and what do I want to communicate to you?”

Subaru presented his sincere, unadorned thoughts to Beatrice, who remained wordless.

While turning a blind eye to how cowardly and unfair it was that he was leaving its reception up to her.

Subaru: “This whole thing with me saving you is a joke, the truth is that you don’t need my help at all. You’re strong, you’re smart, you’re cute, you can do anything you put your mind to, and can have anything you want done.”

Beatrice: “———”

Subaru: “You are more than capable enough of living on your own. Of course. If you weren’t, then you would not have managed four-hundred years. So not a word of this stuff about helping you or saving you resounded with you.”

Beatrice: “———”

Subaru: “But even though you’re strong and smart and can do so many things, it scared you to live on your own. It hurt you. It made you lonely. Nobody can fault you for clinging to That Person.”

Beatrice: “After you rejected... Betty’s feelings... what could you possibly understand!”

Biting her lip, Beatrice glared at Subaru with something like hatred.

But that wavering emotion failed to reach the level of hatred in full. Beatrice held on to that fading fury, frantically trying to preserve it as Subaru shook his head at her.

Subaru: “I do know. That you’re kind. That when someone’s having nightmares, you’ll hold their hand to ease them. That when someone’s in unworkable trouble, you’ll offer your hand and open a path. That when someone you cannot help but hate loses someone close to them, you’ll be sad for them.”

Beatrice: “Talking as if, you know anything.”

Subaru: “I’m powerless. I cannot be of any help to you. Still, I don’t want you to be alone. And if we’re gonna say there’s anything I am able to do, then all I can do is cling and beg.”

Beatrice’s eyes widened. Subaru presented his right hand.

It was raw with burn scars, disgusting to look at. But it was still better than his atrocious left hand after all the damage it had taken.

He wiped it, prepared it, made it clean enough to suitably hold her hand.

Subaru: “Beatrice. Help me.”

Beatrice: “———”

Subaru: “I will not be able to live, I will be lonely without you. Help me.”

To a third-party listener, it would sound an overwhelmingly pathetic and shameful form of coercion.

“I cannot live without you, so please take my hand”, was his threat.

He could not do anything for the other, so he was teaching the other that they could do something for him, and with that rationale, he was demanding that they live.

It was an excessively selfish, unreasonable, and hopeless means of coercion.

Beatrice: “Not, fair... It’s not fair, in fact.”

Subaru: “...”

Beatrice: “Using, those words... and, saying it so... after all this, you... when you’re not That Person... when you rejected Betty, and yet...”

She was tongue-tied, lost for words, hesitant to speak, emotional, and anguished.

Her eyes remained set on the hand presented to her as she firmly embraced the book in her arms. Tears spilled from her eyes.

Beatrice: “I was alone for four-hundred years! I spent all that time in isolation, so what could taking your hand now possibly... You’ll just die anyway! Human lifespan passes in a blink of the eye to Betty... After all of this! How could I cling to this!”

Subaru: “It is impossible for me to imagine your four-hundred years. I can’t talk like I understand it, either. Four centuries, I haven’t even lived a twentieth of that. I know I can’t understand all of your fear for what will come after I die.”

Beatrice: “Then! Then... nothing you’ve said, presents any solution...!”

Subaru: “But, tomorrow, we can be holding hands.”

Beatrice: “———”

Subaru: “Tomorrow, and the day after, and the day after that too. It might not last four-hundred years, but we can spend our days together. It might not last for eternity, but tomorrow, and in this present, I can treasure you.”

Beatrice: “——Hk.”

Subaru: “Beatrice—— Choose me.”

Subaru had already chosen.

Now he presented the choice to Beatrice. It all rested on her.

Would she stay loyal to her mother, and punctuate four centuries by being swallowed in flames? Would she disregard her promise to her mother, abandon her meeting with That Person, and take Natsuki Subaru’s hand?

Beatrice: “Y—you are, That Person is...”

Subaru: “Not me. Don’t equate me to some other guy you built up in your head. I’m me. Natsuki Subaru. Take all your unreciprocated feelings for this four-hundred-year-old asshole you’ve never even seen, and dump them.”

Beatrice: “———”

Subaru: “Rather than fear a goodbye that might come someday, live with me in a definite tomorrow. I’m weak, but I’m still aiming so high... If we’re together, you’ll be so busy fussing over me you’ll stop having time to think about being bored or lonely.”

Beatrice: “...Ngh.”

Subaru: “Choose me, Beatrice.”

He would repeat it however many times it took for the words to reach her. Because he understood her wavering feelings, and her wavering heart. So that the selfishness of Natsuki Subaru could shoulder the burden of her guilt for her indecision, and shame for breaking the promise.

So that this girl would never cry alone ever again.

Beatrice: “But you’ll go away...”

Subaru: “It will not last forever. The future you are fearing will arrive, definitely. The time when you are left behind, eternal as you are, will almost definitely arrive. But only thinking of fear for farewells, and throwing away all the fun of being together... That takes far too much out of our lives.”

Beatrice: “Even though you will leave me...”

Subaru: “Let’s be together. Let’s live together. Let’s go together. Let’s pile memories upon memories, enough to blast away your fears of goodbye, enough that you can smile and say with your chest held high that you enjoyed it. Enough that you recover those four centuries you spent in solitude, and counterbalance them.”

Beatrice: “Even if... that happened! I’ll be alone, someday!”

He stepped forward. Closed the distance.

The girl's wavering eyes reflected him.

He looked pathetic, he looked deplorable, he was a far cry from the prince she had been waiting for. But right there, was your usual, mundane Natsuki Subaru.

Subaru: "You will live forever, and the time you spend with me might only be a microsecond for you. So I will carve it into your soul. My microsecond."

Beatrice: "-----"

Subaru: "—And when all's said and done, Natsuki Subaru was a man who even through eternity was too vivid to ever fade to sepia!"

The Forbidden Library crumbled with the sound of shattering glass.

The area around Subaru and Beatrice was surrounded in spatial fissures and scorching flames. But in this second, he felt not fear. Nor fire.

The only thing in Subaru was Beatrice. And the only thing in Beatrice was Subaru.

Beatrice's shaking hands clutched the book she had received from her mother. With the belief that unhooking her fingers would mean mending her centuries of solitude, Subaru reached out his hand.

And shouted.

Subaru: "Choose me! Beatrice!!"

Beatrice: "—Ah."

Subaru: "You want someone to take you outside! That's why you are always! Sitting opposite the goddamn door!!"

With the decisive boom, that world met its end. The Forbidden Library, the girl's isolated cage, was swallowed and disappeared in rifts and fire. But the instant before that happened.

—The sound of a single book hitting the floor of the Forbidden Library echoed.



Illustration from Volume 15, coloring by Floating ([source](#))

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Having escaped through the hidden passage and reached the mountain cabin, Otto's group watched the mansion burn from atop a hillock.

Otto, Petra, and Frederica. And Rem shouldered on Frederica's back. The four of them had succeeded in safely evacuating through the passage to the mountains.

The mountains, and particularly the area around the cabin, apparently had a barrier around them to repel Witchbeasts. They saw no signs of neither wild nor ambushing Witchbeasts in their vicinity.

But not a single person here had the composure to rejoice about their survival.

All of them gazed at the mansion with a feeling akin to a prayer, waiting for visible change to occur. While trusting in the safety of Subaru and Garfiel, both still inside.

Otto: "-----"

Putting the treatment of his wounds aside for later, Otto gazed at the mansion, regretting even a blink. Petra stood beside him, clutching her arms with a strength inconceivable by her youth.

She was worried, so worried, so worried it was unbearable. Everyone knew that the young girl was greatly fond for Subaru. Considering her grief, it was impossible for Otto not to pray for Subaru's safety.

Otto: "-----"

Otto gently placed his hand atop her head to calm her. He gave her a smile as she looked up at him in surprise, before returning his gaze to the mansion.

And he noticed it.

Otto: "...There."

In the middle of the burning mansion's main wing.

A massive explosion of flame burst from the office holding the hidden passage that Otto's group had used. The windows shattered, overflowing inferno spreading everywhere in an instant, before the mansion lost its shape— and collapsed.

Petra: "Ah..."

Otto heard Petra's cry of grief. And Otto, too, having witnessed the same reality and imagined the same thing as Petra, withstood the urge to scream in denial. If he threw a fit here, it would be a disservice to the heart of the girl who most likely wanted to cry, even more than he did.

But Otto's thoughts were instantly invalidated.

Petra: "Otto-san, look!"

Otto: "Agh!?"

Just when Otto was about to lower his gaze, Petra's little hand slapped him across the cheek.

The impact startled him, sending sparks across his vision and dizzying him. But he soon saw Petra's look of elation as she pointed at the mansion. Otto hurriedly looked over as well, and understood.

Otto: "Hah, hahaha..."

—A pillar of white light was extending from the destroyed mansion to the heavens.

The light twisted like a rainbow, changing its angle high in the sky, shooting far to the east. Practically announcing that its destination laid there.

Otto knew what awaited in that direction. So his cheeks relaxed as he watched Petra cheer in joy.

Otto: "Now it's all up to you— Truly, I am exhausted."

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Meanwhile, the same light that had brought Otto relief was witnessed by Garfiel, half-naked and clad in only a cloth around his waist. He clicked his fangs.

Garfiel: “Ha! So ya did pull it off, Captain! Knew ya’d do it! «Posthumously too Hoshin keeps his promises»^{185!}”

Having escaped the burning mansion and sprinted into the woods, Garfiel put his hand to his hip and laughed like an idiot. Lying on the ground beside Garfiel was a girl, her limbs bound in restraints made of the same cloth as Garfiel’s waistband— Meili, unconscious.

Spoils of war— That was not how he was going to boast about it, but she was a living witness who had been involved in the attack, and there were many things they needed to interrogate her about.

But above all, Garfiel’s principles would not allow him to kill the young girl.

Garfiel: ““Said, the shadow lady must’a been burnt t’a crisp.”

Garfiel gazed at the destroyed mansion, sighing.

He had thrown a Witchbeast at her and crushed her— It was an indirect method that had left no feeling in his own hands, but Garfiel had still chosen to butcher a near-human life of his own volition.

His fingers shook, and he could feel wrenching pain in his stomach.

But Garfiel suppressed those feelings with a shake of his head, seating himself beside the sleeping Meili before leaning against a tree.

Garfiel: “For now we’ll put off th’aftertaste of winnin’ and the feelin’ of killin’. Nothin’ my amazin’ self does now’s gonna accomplish anythin’. Countin’ on you, Captain.”

Thrusting out his fist, Garfiel glared at the trail of white light, and—

Garfiel: “Once this’s all cleaned up, we got a guy we both gotta give a good smack ‘cross the face!”

¹⁸⁵ 『ホーシンは口約束を死んでも守った』 - I would translate this literally as "Hoshin kept his promise even at the exchange of his life" or "Hoshin kept his (verbal) promises, even were he to die" (thanks to Ice for this second one). Fun fact: this very same idiom is present somewhere else in the story. Can you find in what story/chapter it is located, without using search/find?

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—She had been caught.

She had known this would happen, and yet she grasped it.

Even though she had known forever that, should she take this hand, should she cling to this warmth, she would never be able to return to her nights of isolation and solitude.

Even though she had admonished herself about how insanely foolish it had been to live while depending on ephemeral warmth.

That voice, calling her. Those eyes, gazing at her. Those hands, requiring her.

Even though she should have known there was no way she could possibly refuse it.

—Subaru.

Subaru: “Yes, that’s it.”

—Subaru, Subaru.

Subaru: “Yes. That’s my name.”

—Subaru, Subaru, Subaru.

—Subaru!!

Subaru: “And you finally called me by name.”

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—The blizzard raged.

Blinding curtains of white unfurled, every puff of breath freezing the instant it touched the outside air of this gelid world.

The breeze bathing her was frigid, and the blizzard winds carried snow so sharp it nigh cut the skin. But even amidst this ferocious storm, the girl, her silver hair fluttering, held strong willpower in her amethyst eyes, facing forward.

Emilia: "I'm never, never... going to let you take anyone!!"

A glow cased her arms as she stretched them out, and unleashed a massive volume of magical power. The blizzard amplified the ice magic wreathing itself in pale light, which then sliced through the world like an incandescent sword, slashing apart the white Witchbeasts passing overhead one-by-one.

The unpleasant noise of their chittering fangs echoed without end.

The embodiment of hunger— an ancient calamity beyond salvation, specialized only to devour its prey, a being no-one could coexist with.

Faced with the multiplying malice of hunger, there stood, not retreating a single step, the silver-haired girl.

But her breathing was ragged, and she had lost some control over her gargantuan Mana, with white frost beginning to cover her lower body. If this continued, she would soon transform herself into an ice statue. But even though she knew this, she could not retreat.

Emilia: "-----"

The girl glanced behind her.

Located there, everything that she needed to protect from the Witchbeast's slaughter. A dilapidated ruin, and several lives who were placing their hopes upon her small shoulders. And a man, having not entered the ruin, who observed the girl's battle in a daze, and a dead-still pink-haired girl in his arms.

Half her body felt as if it had frozen. But fire blazed in her heart. Who could possibly moan and whine after witnessing that?

For what purpose, and with whose confidence, was she standing here?

Emilia: "I... I won't let you be the end to anybody! Everybody's hands were linked together... And I'm going to protect that! That is what I promised my Mother!"

A torrent of pale light crashed into the horde of approaching Witchbeasts.

They cried no death wails, falling motionless amid the white gleam. They witnessed their companions' sad deaths, before instantly choosing to cannibalize them and chew into ice.

It was a most dreadful sight.

But perhaps, potentially, that was also the appearance of people clinging to hope. Even so. Even so.

Emilia: "As long as I haven't forgotten about Mother and Juice, and about everybody today... and about what he wrote for me, I am never giving up."

Even if she did end up encased in ice, she would never regret it.

Cutting through the blizzard, the ferocious Witchbeasts drew steadily and steadily nearer, closing in on the girl and those relying on her.

She was resolved to give her life in the case of an emergency.

But just when the girl was tormented with that thought, she heard a voice.

???: "No need to push yourself so hard, Emilia-tan."

Emilia: "-----"

She knew that someone had just landed beside her, having descended from high above.

She looked aside. The blizzard was too strong, and she could make out their face through the veil of white.

But she knew exactly who it was. Their voice, their attitude, and above all, the fact they would always come for her whenever she wanted them most.

???: "You can hold off and fall back— The inaugural battle of deliverance is here."

Emilia: "I'm sorry. That kinda went over my head."

It felt like they were smiling.

The silhouette began walking, immediately followed by another, smaller silhouette.

She heard a second voice. One that sounded lively, as if the speaker had been waiting for a very, very long time for this moment---

???: "What comes next is a complete unknown, in fact."

???: "Yeah, we'll be doing something about this--- Together, me and you!!"

Here, Spirit Beatrice and Contractor Natsuki Subaru, two people who would from now on engage in battles upon battles while linked hand-in-hand, commence their inaugural fight.

Arc 4 Chapter 123B - Happiness Reflected on the Water

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 14, Chapter 6 “Lies to Hope”, Part 2 (very end), and Volume 15, Chapter 2 “Happiness Reflected Upon the Water’s Surface”, Parts 1-2 (heavily changed)

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by SummaryAnon – [Complete](#), Page 122

—Taking a breath, she again challenged the Tomb she had just exited.

Inside the stone tomb, isolated from the light of the moon, only the pale glow of the walls provided any source of light. It was not uncommon to see such natural phenomena helping to preserve visibility, in places where ambient Mana thrived.

However, it was unusual for this natural lighting to be inside a manmade structure. It had, most likely, been reproduced by some inbuilt mechanism of the building. A mechanism like a magical device, functional so long as the required Mana was stockpiled— sensing that the lighting in the Tomb followed similar logic, Emilia quietly took a breather.

Inside the Tomb, she felt the distant presence of the Micro Spirits. It was not that they were gone. Micro Spirits were omnipresent like ambient Mana. There was the question of whether their presence was perceivable or whether they were strong enough for their presence to be detected, but there was no place where they could not be found.

This particular perception arose from the wall’s light-producing mechanisms. The Tomb preserved a rather high rate of Mana flowing into and out of its space. The Mana inside the Tomb was kept at a fixed volume, its quantity never exceeding or falling short of that amount.

The amount of Mana needed for preserving the luminescent phenomenon was so scant that the Micro Spirits could not manifest themselves sufficiently. That was why their presence in the Tomb felt faint. Even assuming that Micro Spirits were present, they would be debilitated in this environment.

Emilia: “This place is reeeally nasty for Spiritual Arts Users.”

Reaching that conclusion, Emilia muttered to herself.

Perhaps overcoming the First Trial had somewhat liberated her from her sense of being cornered. Having finally gained enough composure to observe her surroundings, that was Emilia’s impression of the Tomb.

It was no significant threat for a magician, those who casted magic using the Mana stored inside themselves. But were they to exhaust their reserves, there would be no means to replenish them, and so, a magician with a limited number of Gates would probably find the Tomb a troublesome place too.

Although in the case of Emilia and Roswaal, their combat capabilities would be barely affected at all.

Emilia: “Which is strange... since I can hardly sense anyone outside.”

Having regained her capabilities as a Magic user, Emilia’s perception of Mana had strengthened. When outside the Tomb, she had felt the Mana of so many entities that she felt like she could not control her senses. She had probably picked up the Mana of practically all creatures, or perhaps the presence of practically all Od, tugging at her perception. The wear on her mind had been intense. She needed to learn how to control it quickly.

But that behind-the-scenes battle had been postponed while inside the Tomb.

Instead she needed to wait for the Trial. If she were honest, she did not know which option was preferable.

Emilia: “Ram asked me. I have to keep focused.”

Emilia thought of Ram, begging to Emilia with her head bowed.

Ram had never showed such weakness, and there she had been, baring her emotions so intensely. How could Emilia repay her for everything she had done until now if not by answering to her plea?

Subaru, having returned to the mansion without observing Emilia’s results, also had faith in her. His actions expressed his unwavering conviction that Emilia could do it. She needed to answer to Subaru’s trust. Or actually, she needed to do even better than expected and surprise him.

Emilia: "I'm glad they believe in me, but that's not what this is about."

Though they might have been in a rush, Emilia still had to object to the fact that they had all left without seeing her. She should be permitted to jolt them and sulk.

And especially in Subaru's case. The two of them needed to have a very, very serious conversation after this.

Emilia: "Anyway, this feeling... the Trial's here."

The moment she entered the Tomb, Emilia felt it on her skin. She had been skeptical that exiting and entering the Tomb would be enough for the Trial to prepare itself, but the overwhelmingly cool air in the Tomb keenly informed her of the truth.

There was no need to postpone it. Inside the Trial room, the Second Trial was awaiting Emilia.

Emilia: "I saw my past. Then, the next one is...?"

Her cheeks tensed, nearly stiff, as she stroked her belly.

She used the irregularity in her breathing to determine whether her nerves are steeled. They were, acceptably so.

—The Trial Room waited, unchanging, as it welcomed Emilia.

Not even been an hour had passed since she left, so of course it had not changed. As visibility was slightly better here than in the hallway, perhaps this room alone preserved a greater load of Mana. The doorway in the back of the room stood shut and sturdy as ever.

What awaited her there, once she had overcome the Third Trial? Just as that thought popped up in her mind—

???: *"—Witness, a present that was not to be."*

Emilia: "—Hk."

She heard it.

Murmured at her ear, her own voice.

The instant she attempted to think about “a present that was not to be” could mean, her consciousness faded to white.

The intense sensation tore Emilia’s mind and soul from her body, dragging her into another world.

Unable to rebel, Emilia crumpled, leaning against the Tomb’s wall, before collapsing. Her vision blurred, unable to think anything, and her consciousness drowned.

Emilia: “Subaru—”

Unsure of what her own lips had said at the close, the Trial begun.

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???: “Hey now, Lia. Where are you going off to, come over here.”

Stopped by that gentle voice, Emilia turned around.

A woman with short silver hair beckoned her to the dining table. Her eyes were nasty. Her voice was gentle. Either indicated Emilia’s ideal for women.

Emilia: “Mother, Fortuna...”

Fortuna: “...? Are you still half-asleep? Then you stayed up late again. You are not a child anymore, you cannot trouble others like that.”

Fortuna approached, her tone chiding Emilia as she poked her in the forehead. Pressing down on the faint red mark on her forehead, Emilia widened her eyes.

Emilia: “Woah.”

A sound of astonishment slipped out her lips before she could register it. That’s how greatly the sight shook Emilia’s heart.

This was the first time Emilia had ever seen Fortuna sacrifice her ease of movement and wear an apron. The over-adorned frilly white apron was a complete mismatch with Fortuna's personality, but suited her beautiful appearance well.

Emilia: "Mother, you're cute."

Fortuna: "—Where did that come from? You really are half-asleep."

Her cheeks reddening slightly, Fortuna grasped Emilia's shoulders and turned her around. She gave Emilia's back a push, and,

Fortuna: "Go wash your face in the river. You'll stop saying weird things once the cold water's woken you up. Though considering we're talking about you, Lia, that might not change even when you're properly awake."

Emilia: "Wh—what are you saying, Mother? That's not what it is. I'm not half-asleep at all... and I didn't say anything a trifle weird in the first place."

Fortuna: "Where are you learning this archaic speech, a «trifle»? I'm reeeally worried that everyone might be teasing you and putting these things in your head. I'll have to interrogate Archi later."

Emilia pouted. But Fortuna merely nodded back, not conceding an inch. While shocked that her own opinions were not working, Emilia slumped her shoulders and started her journey to the river.

???: "Goodness, hello there, Emilia. You're not looking the cheeriest."

???: "Gosh, she really isn't. Which means Fortuna-sama told her off? She may have stayed up late."

???: "Emilia's old enough now. I'm sure she wants her me-time every now and then."

After exiting her house and embarking along the road to the river, the elves of the village addressed her. A group of older elves sat at a table surrounded by thick tree roots as they chatted. She had heard they were the same age as Fortuna, though everyone, including Fortuna, saw Emilia as a youngster.

Emilia: "Good morning. You're all out early."

Elf 1: “It’s you who’s late, Emilia. It’s nice that you’re helping your Father’s work, but if you don’t use some of your time for yourself, you’ll waste your youth.”

Elf 2: “Exactly, exactly. You’re so cute, Emilia, you need to have fun while you’re cute.”

Elf 3: “If I were as young and cute as you, Emilia, I’d be bicycling the village.”

Emilia tilted her head at the term “bicycling the village” as the women shared looks and laughed, squealing. The details of their conversation were beyond Emilia, but it was good that everyone was having fun.

Finding herself feeling happy, Emilia relaxed as well.

Elf: “There, now that’s much better than looking down. Smile, smile, let’s see a smile.”

Emilia: “—Right.”

After pointing at the smiling Emilia, the women’s fingers pulled her own cheeks into a grin. Finding their argument as legitimate, Emilia identically smiled and nodded.

Waving a goodbye to the women, Emilia continued on her course towards the river. She scaled the gnarled tree-roots, passed through gaps in verdant leaves. Hearing the burbling of water, Emilia broke into a jog, her face beaming.

Emilia: “Iiiii’m— heeere!”

???: “Wagh!? Emilia!?”

The instant she pushed a branch out of the way and pokes out her head, she sees someone toweling themselves dry right in front of her, shock on their face. Realizing that the intruder was Emilia, the youth’s eyes flitted here and there and there in confusion—

Emilia: “Ah.”

Youth: “Ah.”



Illustration from Volume 15, coloring by Xarlasar ([source](#))

Emilia put her hand to her mouth as the youth slipped, sending him plunging into the river head-first. A spray of water splashed up as he landed in the brook.

Emilia: “Archi! Are you okay?”

Standing atop where he had fallen, Emilia looked down and called down to him.

Bubbles rose one after another on the water’s face for a moment, before a blond young man floated to the surface. He wiped his face with his hand, then raised his hand at the onlooking Emilia.

Archi: “Look, Emilia! Don’t interrupt people right when they’re almost done bathing!”

Emilia: “I’m sorry. I didn’t think anyone’d be here... But I’m glad it was you, Archi.”

Archi: “What are you implying!?”

Emilia stroked her chest in relief. Archi yelled, cursing the absurdity of it all. Emilia put her finger to her lips and hummed.

Emilia: “Hmm... I mean we’re close Archi, so you’ll forgive me.”

Archi: “Uh...”

Emilia: “Me, I’ve always thought of you like a big brother... so you’ll definitely say there was no helping today and forgive me, I think.”

Archi: “Think what? Goddamnit... Has no idea how I feel...”

Archi mumbled his regrets while sinking his mouth into the water, spewing bubbles. Which meant that the latter of his statement was drowned out, and Emilia did not hear it.

Emilia: “And I came here to take a bath too. Can I jump in next to you?”

Archi: “Wha—? I—idiot, don’t! Take a bath, in somewhere as open as this? Of course you can’t! Be a little more modest! Are you trying to be a child forever!?”

Emilia: “Eeeh...”

Archi: “No eeehs!”

Emilia: “Waaah...”

Archi: “No waaahs either!”

Having readied herself to leap into the river, Emilia pouted at Archi’s prohibition on bathing. She was not sure why he acted so panicked, but Archi was being mean to her today nonetheless.

Maybe he was mad about slipping and falling in the river.

Emilia: “Archi, I’m sorry.”

Archi: “Errr, hm... H—how come you’re being so docile suddenly?”

Emilia: “I thought maybe you really didn’t like falling in. I’m sorry. So let me take a bath too. If I don’t, Mother Fortuna won’t let me eat.”

Archi: “That’s something a kid would think!”

Archi shouted at Emilia’s stern words, hands to his head. He stopped paddling like a dog for an instant and sunk into the water slightly. Meaning that, for an instant, he had taken his attention off Emilia.

Emilia: “Woooo!”

Archi: “Ah!”

After her quiet cheer, sunlight skimmed across Emilia’s eyelashes, a feeling like floating being felt. Her silver hair fluttered out behind her as she shot toes-first into the water. Emilia’s contact with the water gave not a single unneeded splash as she sunk with shocking calm, reaching the bottom of the deep river. In the clear water, Emilia’s open eyes sighted fish and water plants swaying in the current. Her foot contacted the river bottom, Emilia savoring the tickly feeling of sand as she ascended.

Her face pops up beside Archi,

Emilia: “—Paah!”

Archi: “No! Paahs!”

Emilia smoothed her wet hair back, and swam away from the yelling Archi with repeated backstrokes.

Archi furrowed his brows, perhaps wishing to rebuke her once again, but it seemed that nothing would stop Emilia anyway. He gave a deep sigh and went around to behind Emilia.

Emilia: "This feels nice, Archi."

Archi "Well, you jumped in yourself so maybe it does for you. I got pushed in and sprayed with water when you jumped in so I'm feeling terrible."

Emilia: "Okay. I'm glad you're having fun too."

Archi: "You really are an optimistic girl, Emilia..."

Feeling complimented, Emilia floated on the water as she puffed out her chest. Archi averted his gaze and scratched his nose. His cheeks were red, yet the water was cold. Did he have a fever?

Emilia: "Are you feeling sick? Is that why you're mad you fell in the water?"

If that was the case, then of course he would tell her off for what she had done, even after she apologized. She would like to drag Archi out of the river and heal him with magic immediately if so.

Archi: "No it's not that, don't worry. That's not what's going on. Ummm, Emilia. Around guys, you shouldn't, no, I mean, around people, you should not be this defenseless. Especially around people you aren't close with."

Emilia: "...? But Archi, you are the closest one to me?"

Archi: "Even around people you're close with! Ummm... B—but just only do it around me."

Emilia: "Not around Mother?"

Archi: "Ok, around Fortuna-sama too, just me and that woman!"

Yelling at Emilia as she tilted her head, Archi bit his lip, his face reddening further. Then he sunk into the water and grumbled, disappearing from Emilia's view as she furrowed her brows.

As she thought about his words, Archi splashed up by the riverbank, pulling himself onto the shore.

Archi: “Okay, you get out of there too, Emilia. When you’re just trying to wake up, usually you’d just wash your face, not take a full bath. I don’t think Fortuna-sama would tell you go take a bath right in the morning.”

Emilia: “Actually, you might be right... I didn’t bring a change of clothes.”

Archi: “Seriously, what are you doing...”

Archi looked even more astonished at Emilia’s reckless behavior. Emilia started swimming over to him, when he dashed into the forest, returning with a towel.

Archi: “Wipe yourself down with this, and wrap it around yourself until you get back to your house. Heck, you’re a handful of a child no matter how old you get.”

Emilia: “Ahaha, I’m sorry, Archi. Thank you for lending me this.”

Even Emilia had to reflect on her actions after all this. His outstretched hand took her arm and pulled her out of the river, where she took the towel to dry her long hair. It glimmered silver in the sunlight, terribly heavy with water.

Emilia: “Was my hair always this long?”

Archi: “What are you talking about? You’ve been growing it out for ages, saying that it’s the same color as Fortuna-sama’s, and looks pretty.”

The towel absorbed the water, when Archi hit her with that statement. After hearing it being spoken out loud it did feel like he was right, but when exactly had she decided to grow it out?

Although feeling something was not quite right, Emilia chose to avert her gaze from the oddity. She got the moisture out of her hair and began rubbing her body with the towel. That done, she peered into the river and reached out to fulfil her original goal of washing her face—

—Seeing her face reflected on the water, Emilia’s throat jarred.

Pale skin. Amethyst eyes. Pink lips. Long, glistening silver hair. All those were components belonging to herself. Nothing had changed, and nothing was strange.

As if. Strange things, odd things, incorrect things, were all she was seeing here.

Emilia: “Ah, uh...”

Patting, slapping at her cheeks, Emilia exhaled irregular breath after irregular breath. Her lungs felt like they were convulsing. She could not breathe properly. Her guts constricted, throbbing, painful pressure coursing through her whole body.

Archi: “Emilia, what’s wrong?”

Noticing Emilia’s abnormal state, Archi spoke with his voice low. Emilia kept staring at the water’s edge, motionless, as Archi touched her shoulder and stroked her head from behind.

Archi: “Did you see something strange in the river?”

Emilia: “...No.”

Archi: “Did your stomach start hurting? I can’t use healing magic, so I’ll have to take you to someone else...”

Emilia: “That’s, not it.”

She felt the touch of Archi’s palm and heard the sound of his voice. But she did not draw her gaze away from the water.

Archi followed Emilia’s gaze, seemingly realizing what she was looking at. He timidly pointed at Emilia reflected on the water.

Archi: “Did something happen to your face? But I think it looks the same, pretty as always.”

Emilia: “It’s an adult’s...”

Archi: “Huh?”

Emilia: “My face is an adult’s... I’ve never even seen my face before.”

Seeing an unfamiliar face on the water, Emilia whispered with a trembling voice.

She moved her fingers to check whether the face belonged to her, but the reflection mirrored her movements, denying her of that possibility. That face was hers. She had never seen it before, and yet it was hers.

Emilia: “I...”

After noticing that one decisive peculiarity, many more inconsistencies came into focus. She looked down. Her chest had grown. Her hair too. Her limbs were longer than she remembered, and there was supposed to be a bigger height difference between herself and Archi.

People’s perceptions of her, people’s conversations with her had both changed in nuance.

And how many times had people pointed out that she was not a child? No. She wasn’t anymore.

Emilia: “—I have to go.”

Archi: “Emilia?”

Emilia stood up, her head swaying slightly as she turned around.

The forest she ran through, and the village. She needed to go back to the house where Fortuna awaited her. She did not know what she needed to do yet, but that point alone was undeniably truth.

Emilia: “Archi, I’m sorry. I’m going back to Mother Fortuna.”

Archi: “Y—yeah... That’s fine, but is everything okay with you?”

Emilia: “I’m fine now. I’m sorry for interrupting your bath. And I’ll be okay without the towel.”

Emilia took off the towel, pushing it against the confused Archi. She made sure that he had taken it before breaking barefoot into a run. As fast as she could, back to her house— and behind her,

Archi: “Emilia!”

She heard Archi’s voice.

Her heart insisted that she had no time to wait, but she still ended up stopping. As if someone had told her to never let a single thing Archi would say escape her.

She glanced back. Archi raised his hand.

Archi: “I don’t know what happened, but if you’re ever worried about something, you can always talk to me! Because I... Because I’m like a brother to you!”

After a second of hesitation, Archi gave Emilia those impassioned words. For some reason, hearing them made something surge up in Emilia’s chest. She was definitely happy to have heard those words.

But she had a feeling that that the thing swelling up in her heart differed from ordinary joy.

Emilia: “Right! Thank you, onii-chan!”

Emilia waved in response to the blushing Archi, and resumed her run.

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Fortuna: “...I’m sure I only told you to wash your face, so how did you manage to come back with your whole body sopping wet? Your Mother’s mystified.”

Sighed an astonished Fortuna as she welcomed her dripping-wet daughter back home.

While her hair had mostly been toweled dry, Emilia’s white clothing was adhering to her skin, water dripping from her skirt.

Emilia: “I’m sorry, Mother. I was kinda... reeeally kinda half-asleep.”

Fortuna: “I know I told you to wash your face to get rid of your sleepiness, and you sure did put some energy into doing that. You really are a child no matter how old you get. Did anyone see you looking like this?”

“It would be embarrassing if someone saw you looking like a drowned rat”, was probably what she meant. Then no, miraculously, she had not run into anybody on the way back.

Emilia: “No, it’s okay. Only Archi saw.”

Fortuna: “Hm... Archi. Well, if it’s that boy... But I suspect Archi has started viewing you differently than he used to...”

Emilia: “Mother?”

Fortuna: “Ah, hm, no, it’s nothing. Now, come here.”

Emilia lowered her gaze. Fortuna looked on resignedly before stroking Emilia’s head, then taking her hand, and pulling her into the house. But water continued to drip from her clothes.

Emilia: “Mother, the house is getting all wet.”

Fortuna: “I just need to towel that dry afterwards. Anyway, have this towel, so dry yourself with that and go get changed in your room. I’ll make breakfast once you get back.”

This house, made in a hollowed-out tree, had been created by pouring Mana into an old tree to change its shape. Emilia and Fortuna’s house had been hand-made by Fortuna, and was a rather large dwelling for merely two people. Each of their rooms was on the second floor, while the first floor was a dining and kitchen space. Thinking back on it, it had been a luxurious use of rooms.

—”Thinking back on it” was a rather weird statement.

Fortuna: “Come on, get going.”

Emilia: “Wagh!”

A towel pressed itself into her face while she was in thought. Emilia looked at Fortuna in protest, but seeing her Mother’s gaze as she put her hand to her hip quickly drove Emilia to surrender.

The towel smelled like sun on her face. She dried herself as she returned to her room on the second floor.

Her room was rather simple. That was also valid for Fortuna, but Emilia did not particularly like pointless decorations. Her room hosted the bare minimum of furniture, with a few extra fixtures. It had a wooden

box with her clothes in it, which Emilia squatted down next to. She grabbed a random outfit out of it and speedily changed out of her wet clothes into that.

Just like with her room, Emilia felt no urge to embellish her clothing.

She pulled a short-sleeved outfit, long enough to cover her upper and lower body, over her head. Then she changed her undergarments, and exited the room— While making a conscious effort not to look at the object beside the clothes box.

Emilia: “Mother Fortuna, I’ll wash the wet clothes by myself, so...”

???: “Goodness. I think that filial and excellent of you.”

Emilia: “———”

Emilia put the laundry in a basket and came back down the stairs, only to hear a man’s voice welcoming her. Emilia’s breathing stopped as she heard that kind, affectionate voice. She looked over at the dining table.

Usually Fortuna and Emilia would be the only ones around that table, and so one of these three chairs was excessive. It was the chair they used when a certain someone was visiting, and was usually brought out from the back of the house by Fortuna.

The familiar person seated in that chair was, of course,

Emilia: “Juice.”

Juice: “Indeed, it is lovely to see you again, Emilia-sama. Now, has anything notably different happened for you?”

Emilia: “Me? No, it’s been same as usual. Juice, it’s been reeeally long since you’ve been here. I didn’t know you were coming today, how come you’re here?”

Juice: “You did not know? I was sure that I had asked my finger to contact you prior...”

The mild-faced man, Juice, put his hand to his chin in thought. He was a good-natured person and appeared to be earnestly disconcerted, but Emilia instantly deduced the culprit. She passed by Juice to peer into the kitchen, where she saw Fortuna with her hand to her mouth, stifling a laugh.

Emilia: “Mother, you kept it a secret.”

Fortuna: “Huhu, now did I? I might’ve only forgotten about it.”

Emilia: “I don’t think so. Juice’s seat is there, and you’re making food for three.”

Fortuna: “Ah, sharp eyes. You’re usually a little ditzy, but you’re so perceptive about these things.”

Fortuna winked at Emilia and whistled as she picked up a dish, presenting it to Emilia.

Fortuna: “Now come help set the table, Lia. You can’t cook anything on your own, so I should at least be able to ask you to arrange things.”

Emilia: “Hmph... Changing the subject. And I can’t cook because you won’t teach me.”

Fortuna: “You’ll absolutely mix up sugar and salt, and I’m too scared to put a girl who can’t handle a knife properly in the kitchen.”

Cutting off Emilia’s rebuttals, Fortuna laid the dishes on the table. Although unsatisfied, Emilia followed her to the table.

Seated at the table, Juice looked at the fragrant dishes, breaking into a smile.

Juice: “I am privileged to partake in your cooking, Fortuna-sama. This joy does not fade, no matter how many times I experience it.”

Fortuna: “And there you go again, saying that so easily.”

Juice: “I am merely conveying my honest feelings?”

Fortuna: “That’s what I’m saying is devious.”

Juice tilted his head, looking somewhat distressed.

Watching their exchange made Emilia smile. Just watching them was enough to make Emilia completely forget about how Fortuna had argued her into submission.

Emilia: “Juice, if Mother’s food makes you so happy, you should just live here too.”

Fortuna: “Wh— Emilia!”

While placing a large plate overflowing with vegetables on the middle of the table, Emilia went with the flow of conversation and tried that sentence out. Immediately, Fortuna looked panicked, her face flashing red as she glanced over at Juice.

Fortuna: “D—don’t say anything crazy. Juice has so much work to do, he’s fitting time in his busy schedule to come see us and...”

Juice: “I am overjoyed by your offer, Emilia-sama. Were it a possibility, I would like to oblige. I sincerely would.”

Fortuna rushed to object while Juice replied calmly, the two in utter contrast. Juice’s statement killed Fortuna’s momentum and she sunk down into her chair, before attempting to make herself look small.

Looking at the two, Emilia also took her seat.

—This scene unfolding before her looked overwhelmingly natural to Emilia.

Emilia: “Mother, Juice, if neither of you object, then you should just do it. No one is going to stop you from doing it. Ah... Unless I’m stopping you?”

It was as clear as day that Fortuna and Juice thought favorably of each other. Perhaps they were not going any further than this fixed limit because of Emilia’s presence. However, Emilia’s worry was—

Fortuna: “You’re not.”

Juice: “You are not.”

—Promptly dispelled by the two as a needless anxiety at the same time.

Emilia's eyes widened. Fortuna and Juice looked at each other, realizing that they had said the same thing, and laughed.

Emilia: "See, you really do get along reeeally well."

Fortuna: "Stop teasing us, Emilia. Juice, scold her too."

Juice: "Indeed, Emilia-sama. Fortuna-sama is a splendid person. If someone like me overstays their welcome, it would burden her with objectionable rumors."

Emilia: "Hmph. But I think you're too late for that."

Juice undersold himself all the while putting Fortuna on a pedestal. Emilia saw sadness in Fortuna's gaze as she looked at him. So, Emilia raised her finger.

Emilia: "After all, everyone always tells me not to cause trouble for Mother Fortuna or Father Romanée-Conti when I go outside the house."

It was pretty funny how dumbstruck the two looked at hearing that. Emilia put both her hands to her mouth to keep herself from laughing, and calming her breathing down,

Emilia: "I'm serious. I even stayed up last night, and got mesmerized in bridging the differences between the old books you gave me, Juice, and the maps... Everyone praises me for helping in my Father's work."

Fortuna: "Wh—who is, saying..."

Emilia: "Tehena-san from across the street, Mitto-san and auntie Tanse."

Fortuna: "Those three gossips...!"

With the mental picture of their faces floating in the air, Fortuna bit her lip in frustration. Her brows shot down in anger, her face just a little bit scarier.

Emilia consoles her with a "now now", and—

Emilia: "Anyway, everyone thinks that. And me too, hm, I, uhh, thought about stuff, kinda a lot, and, hmm, uhhh... It's..."

Juice: “Emilia-sama, there is no need to force yourself to deliberate it.”

Emilia: “N—no! I think it’s good! But it just kinda feels like Mother’s being taken away, so I can’t calm down!”

Everyone else was fully ready for it, but the two of them and Emilia were all being fickle. Though their problem was their own thing, Emilia did not like that her emotions were getting in the way of their decision. After all, even by Emilia’s view, they were a wonderful match for each other.

Emilia: “I think it’d be reeeally great. You two should think about it too.”

Fortuna and Juice: “———”

Emilia: “No one in the forest, and me neither, and no one else is going to stop you. I’m not going to let anyone tell you that it’s bad or that you can’t do it!”

Emilia’s hands crashed on the table as she spoke zealously.

She then realized that she was getting too passionate, and got slightly scared. The two gazed at her as she stroked her hair and slowly sat herself.

Emilia: “A—and so... I’ll leave the rest to you young’ns.”

Fortuna: “Seriously, Emilia, where are you leaning this?”

Fortuna looked astonished as always at blushing Emilia’s comment. But the expression soon vanished beneath a laugh.

Fortuna: “Hehe, huhuhu.”

Juice: “Ahaha, Emilia-sama... Indeed, you have grown. I was lacking in discernment when I judged that nothing was different.”

Fortuna: “You were, Juice. She’s my prized daughter, it’s only natural.”

Juice: “Yes, I underestimated her.”

Fortuna and Juice looked at each other and laughed.

The atmosphere around the two was even more tender than before, and Emilia sensed that her own statements had brought changes.

The two of them were abound with warmth. The gaze they shared, surely carried a different nuance from before.

—It was a terribly happy scene.

Fortuna: "...Emilia?"

Fortuna glanced at Emilia, calling her name.

Emilia swallowed her breath, burying her face in her hands. She let out a forced "Ah", wiping away the tears threatening to spill from her eyes in a panic.

Emilia: "I think there's some gunk in my eye. Gunk that's reeeally big."

Fortuna: "That big? Are you okay?"

Emilia: "I'm okay, it's only fist-sized."

Juice: "A—are you certain you will be well?"

Emilia: "I'm fine!"

Emilia rubbed vigorously at her eyes as she stood up. She left the table, and began heading for the second floor.

Emilia: "I'm going to put in some really good eyedrops. It'll freshen my eyes up so well they'll fall out."

Fortuna: "Your eyes are such a pretty amethyst, Emilia, so please don't throw them away. They're exactly like my brother's, they are lovely."

Emilia: "And they're the same pretty color as yours, Mother."

Perhaps not expecting that response, Fortuna's eyes opened in surprise. Emilia saw Juice laugh at her expression, and Emilia laughed as well.

She smiled as her foot landed on the staircase, and glanced back at the two.

Emilia: “You two eat breakfast. I’ll be back right away.”

Fortuna: “It won’t taste well once it gets cold, so really do come back right away.”

Emilia: “Mhm, right away.”

Juice: “Then we will await your return at leisure, Emilia-sama.”

With those send-offs from Fortuna and Juice, Emilia took a deep breath. She glanced back one last time, looking down at the two at the table,

Emilia: “—I love you both.”

With that, Emilia returned to her room. Emilia closed the door to her room and sighed, expelling all the air inside her.

Her innards felt like they had been squeezed, constricted. She slapped her cheeks to psych herself up and shook her head, then walking over to a corner of the room. Next to Emilia’s box of clothes was something long and thin, with a thin cloth draped over it. Emilia had never thought to reach for that thing until now, but,

Emilia: “If I don’t face it, it won’t start.”

—Please give me courage.

Emilia traced her finger over her lips, remembering that warmth as she pulled down the drape.

The cloth fell. Behind it was a polished mirror, one that reflected Emilia from her head to her toes—

???: “—Did this scene of ideal happiness grant you anything?”

—There was a white-haired Witch standing where Emilia’s image should be.



Arc 4 Chapter 124B - You Reflected in the Mirror

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 15, Chapter 2 “Happiness Reflected Upon the Water’s Surface”, Parts 3-4 (heavily changed), and Volume 14, Chapter 6 “Lies to Hope”, Part 4

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by SummaryAnon – [Complete](#), Page 244

While facing the Witch staring back at her from the mirror, Emilia sighed. Composed solely of monochrome black and white, the Witch of Greed, Echidna.

Having discovered Echidna in this dreamworld reproduction of her room, Emilia felt that it truly was a place constructed out of her own head.

A peaceful, tranquil, kind world where her life in the forest had continued forever. A world where she could have spent her days alongside Fortuna’s, Juice’s, Archi’s, and everybody else’s smiles.

Emilia: “But such a world doesn’t exist, does it...”

Echidna: “Completely not. This is a false world constructed with your memories and wishes as the basis. However, the world-building algorithms that precede over the Trial transcend human knowledge. The people you see in this world are most exactly who they would have been, had there been just one flick of the switch.”

Emilia had just remembered the truth of the day of Elio Forest’s freezing. Had there been no casualties back then, and the forest’s tranquility been preserved, their lives would have been ones filled with smiles.

The sight of Fortuna and Juice, seated jovially at the dinner table, had seared itself into Emilia’s mind. It was exactly the scene that young Emilia had wished to see from the bottom of her heart, and the same went for the present Emilia, with her memories restored.

Echidna: “Has witnessing a present that was not to be made you want to submerge in this world?”

As if peering into Emilia's heart, Echidna assaulted her with sweet temptation.

Emilia raised her head. Echidna gazed back, her eyes as cold as her voice. She stroked her snow-white hair, letting it flow over her shoulder and down her back.

Echidna: "Your mother, and that goodman. Did witnessing their happiness not make you desire this to continue forever? I'm sure you thought it pleasant and so dreamed of spending your days with everyone in the forest, and of your friends being so familiar with you."

Emilia: "...What are you trying to say?"

Echidna: "Just airing out some resentment. The fact you have found me means that you have already reached your answer regarding this world. And I know that this answer of yours is to choose reality over dream, which is exceedingly dull. If we're going to be seeing results regardless, I may as well leave some faint wounds behind."

Emilia: "———"

Echidna: "Rather than the happiness of your mother and your peers, you are electing for a reality where they met unfortunate demise. And so, the result of your Trial is that you are ultimately a wretched woman who prioritizes herself over others."

Echidna's fierce criticism stabbed through Emilia's chest. Her words had cut so deeply that Emilia felt physical pain, and though she had not been stabbed for real, she put her hand to her chest, impulsively retreating a step.

Emilia's reaction made Echidna snort.

Echidna: "It seems that has given you some semblance of self-awareness. The Trial does not take the personality of its challengers into consideration anyway. As long as they're qualified, be they hopelessly bankrupt of morals, or be they a conglomerate of egotistic narcissism, the Trial will accept them equally. Rest assured, you'll achieve your goals in short time."

Emilia: "Ah... You're reeeally going after such a sore spot. Are you like this with everyone?"

Echidna: "Not at all."

Echidna shrugged in response to Emilia's strained statement.

Echidna: "Other than you, there are only two people in the world who I interact with spitefully."

Emilia: "It doesn't make me happy at all to be among those three, out of the whole world. I don't remember ever doing anything that would make you hate me that much."

Echidna: "There is no need to look so worried. My hatred for you has nothing to do with you being a half-elf. It is not a question of your pedigree. Unrelated to blood or nature, I just hate you... Or rather, that may not be strictly correct."

Emilia: "———?"

Echidna lowered her gaze, feeling something off about the latter half of her statement. Emilia furrowed her brows at the brooding Witch, before giving a small shake of the head.

There was no way she could turn tail and leave those previous comments go without remark. Echidna had said many things that needed to be invalidated. Not only for Emilia's sake, but for the honor of everyone in the forest.

Emilia: "I don't think much can be done about your hate for me. I know how hard it is to make everyone like me. Since so many people have told me they hate me."

Echidna: "If that is the case, then it would have been nice of you to show some prudence and stay in the forest."

Emilia: "Well I'm not going to do that. I'm sure I said it in the last Trial. I'm going to melt the ice and save everybody. Then I'm going to hold my chest high and teach everyone that now the world is an easier place to roam."

Echidna: "Easier to roam. What a barefaced lie. Discrimination between races is still entrenched, and people cannot easily accept those who differ from themselves. That is why places like Sanctuary retain their function to this day. The disagreements you are referring to will forever result in the accumulation of casualties throughout the world. Am I wrong?"

Emilia: "You're not wrong."

Echidna's severe comments had put Emilia on the border of pessimism. Emilia still remembered the days she had spent with Puck in the forest. How the nearby villages had feared her and showered her in more than a few curses and more than a little spite.

Echidna's merciless attitude made Emilia recall those days. She could try not to recollect them, but those wounds and their unhealed scars continued to assert their pain.

Emilia: "But I am going to act as if you are."

Echidna: "-----"

Still focused on the pain of those wounds, Emilia firmly argued against Echidna. She watched Echidna narrow her eyes, and bit her lip, strength entering her eyes.

Emilia: "Being unlike others makes painful disagreements happen sometimes. Whether there are many of you or not might be a big factor for determining who are the victims and who are the perpetrators, too, sometimes."

Echidna: "And through history, that has been repeated over and over. People cannot accept those unlike them. Disparity in numbers represents disparity in strength. The many oppress the few. Now that you understand this truth and have gotten a little bit wiser, what are you going to do? Gather up the few, and create a paradise for weaklings? Wouldn't that be exactly the nature of this place we call Sanctuary?"

Emilia: "I think... That is one possible option. But I want to choose a different path. Even if I cannot change the fact there have been victims or assailants, the future's another story."

The second that Emilia said the word "future", Echidna's expression froze numb.

To Emilia, it felt like Echidna was angry, as if it was something she absolutely did not want to hear from Emilia, of all people. But yet Emilia continued.

Emilia: "I'm sure I'll be doing lots of things throughout the Royal Selection. I might face even more insults and spite than I ever did before. But I will always wish to say that I will never stop. To ask what is so wrong about being different from someone else. To ask what's so scary about being unlike our neighbors."

Echidna: “I would rather have you stop making me say this, but what I say is undeniably true. People cannot accept the discrepancies between themselves and others. By their very nature, all creatures desire for others to be the same as themselves. To like the same things, to love the same things, to hate the same things, to abhor the same things— Once that happens, they feel secure and reassured, and love their capacity to sympathize. Your platform will be denied as the ramblings of the weak.”

Emilia: “But that’s just neglect to think! It’s lame!”

Echidna: “L—lame...?”

Echidna’s eyes shot open to Emilia’s loud shout, looking like she had not expected that word in the least. Emilia exclaimed, “It is!”, and puffed out her chest.

Emilia: “It’s reeeally lame. Just because they aren’t like their neighbors, they hate each other... Are they children? It’s ridiculous that someone would block their ears for a reason like that. I’ll say it countless times to any of those nitwits. Rather than mindlessly yell about not liking it, if you’re looking to stop me from saying the same thing over and over, it’s easier to change your thinking a little.”

Echidna: “Absolutely self-centered. Incredible self-deception. You’ll eliminate others’ opinions that you wish not to hear, so that you may enforce your own?”

Emilia: “I’m not eliminating anything. It’s up to them whether they take their hands off their ears—I’m just confident that I’m more stubborn than them.”

Her hand to her hip, Emilia demonstrated to Echidna that her resolve would not bend. Echidna’s expression turned sour and she averted her gaze from Emilia.

Echidna: “Whatever you may wish to assert, the world has yet to changed. The forest-dwellers, frozen in ice, supposing they are alive and you do bring them into a thawed world, society is not prepared to accept them. All you are doing is tossing those who were kind to you into adversity. All for the sake of your hypocritical beliefs.”

Emilia: “...”

Echidna: “You wish to free your friends as soon as you can. But once you do, your friends will suffer as the world rejects them. Living is suffering, and so death too, is suffering. In a world like this, what can your individual attitude do? What can it change? What does it change?”

Echidna was sincerely inquiring this of Emilia. She had verified Emilia’s resolve through the two Trials, one of the past and one of the impossible present. Now, Echidna was asking Emilia about her resolve for the future. About Emilia’s prospects if she followed her intentions through.

About the route she would take to reach her imagined future. About what Emilia would use as her cornerstone, and what tangible basis she would use to create this path.

Emilia nodded in reply, and—

Emilia: “I’ll think about that after I finish the Trial!”

Echidna: “—Huh?”

Emilia: “Getting so focused on the future that I forget the present is putting cart before ground dragon. I know how this sounds coming from me, but I’m a blunderer. When there’s a wall I must scale, but I worry about what’s on the other side, I wind up falling into the hole at the foot of the wall.”

Between the Trials and her argument with Subaru, Emilia felt that she had a rather correct, objective view of herself. She felt that her appraisal of herself was also honest.

She was not clever enough that she could manage many things on her own. It was a question of whether she would manage to achieve results, after putting in her very best effort on whatever was laid in front of her.

She had hope for the future. Prospects for the future.

Resolved to aim for those hopes and prospects, the very first step on the road to achieve them must be taken. And right now, she had to establish that that firm first step.

Echidna: “...I finally remembered how pointless it is to debate with you. Honestly this was all rather idiotic of me.”

Emilia: "I know that you're smart, but I kinda think it's reeeally unfair that you shut down other people's opinions like that."

Echidna: "Do you sincerely believe that we exchanged any opinions? I presented questions, and you replied with empty platitudes. I had forgotten. That you are a hopeless child, unable to stand on your own, constantly relying on others, a weak woman."

Emilia: "You're right... I am a weak child."

Emilia lowered her eyes and shook her head slightly. But she immediately looked back up, matching her gaze to Echidna's.

Emilia: "But is being weak really that bad?"

Echidna: "...What?"

Emilia: "I know the person who taught me something very important would say this. It is not wrong to be weak. It is wrong to want to stay weak."

She thought of that black-haired, nasty-eyed boy. Lamenting his powerlessness, but kind and thus suffering more wounds than anyone else in his efforts, he was a precious boy. If it were him, who borrowed everyone's aid but nevertheless took a place for the most painful parts, he would absolutely say that.

Echidna: "Reorientation."

Emilia: "Mhm. I was slow to find my way."

Seeing how a smile appeared on Emilia's face, Echidna perceived that there truly was no room for debate. Echidna had no methods to stop the persistently optimistic, overly enthusiastic Emilia.

Meddling in the issue any further would even begin to impact her dignity as a Witch.

Echidna: "...Well, enjoy the remaining Trial. Once you have completed it, a reality far harsher than these Trials awaits you. I'm sure you will come to understand just how difficult it will be to uphold your shiny banalities."

Emilia: “Thank you for going out of the way to talk to me. I’ll make sure to remember what you’ve told me. And...”

Echidna was moments away from disappearing from the mirror. Seeing how her reflection had begun to fade in the mirror, Emilia continued her speech. Echidna furrowed her brows, looking sour. And Emilia—

Emilia: “Thank you for showing me this world.”

Echidna: “——”

Emilia: “It might be an impossible world, but I still wanted to see it. I never thought a day would come where I’d see them, Mother and... Father Juice, laughing together like this. Thank you.”

It had indeed hurt when Echidna had told her that this world was not real.

But even if it was an impossible world, those scenes would have occurred. Those scenes full of happiness and love, enough to make Emilia tremble in joy and sorrow.

“I’m so glad I got to see this”, thought Emilia from the bottom of her heart.

Echidna: “...You.”

And so Emilia expressed her thanks— and Echidna’s expression shifted.

Her expression had been one of witnessing something disgusting, her attitude had been one of withstanding displeasure, her stance had been one of scorn towards all actions Emilia took, and she had shown many such faces until now— But this expression was different from all of them.

—Echidna, looking close to tears, simply gazed at Emilia.

Emilia: “Echidna?”

Echidna: “I hate you— I just, hate you.”

Echidna, voice strangled and face cast down, responded to that call.

Her image in the mirror then warped, the white-haired Witch disappearing from the glass in an instant. Instead what appeared was a girl with long, silver hair and—

Emilia: “—Hk!”

A wave of rejection speared through Emilia’s chest as she promptly averted her gaze from the mirror. Her pulse had accelerated, and her breathing had grown slightly ragged.

She was supposed to have prepared herself for this, but it still terrified her to be reflected in a mirror.

Emilia: “———”

A century had passed before Puck saved Emilia from the ice in the frozen Elio Forest— She had never seen how she looked like having grown up.

The reason was simple. She was just scared.

Her century of slumber in the ice meant that Emilia’s heart had remained immature, while her body had matured to womanhood. Once she regained consciousness, and first realized that she could not control her body very well, Emilia had been struck with the illusion that her body may not be hers, and spent many nights in tears.

The reactions from the neighboring villagers had intensified that trauma of hers. Emilia shared the same distinctive physical traits as the Witch of Envy, and the villagers had feared her like a demon. Even though they had realized that Emilia meant no harm, they nonetheless continued to alienate her.

Even if people got to know that Emilia had not meant to do anything, what awaited her was still a life of discrimination, spite, and curses. During that time, Emilia had come to recognize, even subconsciously, that people hated her because she looked like the Witch of Envy.

That was when she first started rejecting mirrors and keeping her eyes from her own visage, which others detested.

Puck had noticed Emilia’s mental wounds, and removed everything reflective from her vicinity. He would even call out to her when she was out fetching water, distracting her so that she would not have to face herself on the water’s surface.

—One of the clauses in her Contract with Puck stated that he would be the one in charge of Emilia’s daily grooming. That was most likely something to protect Emilia.

To protect his daughter, who could not bear to look at herself in a mirror, Puck had used the Contract as a pretext to mask her trauma.

Emilia: "...Just how many people have protected me?"

And how long had she spent sulking alone, without realizing how others felt? This was the end of that time she had spent in ignorance of what she had been given.

She took a breath and froze. Then she raised her head, undertaking the personally monumental deed of looking at herself in a mirror.

Reflected in the mirror was a girl with long silver hair and amethyst eyes. Someone who was glaring so intently at her, it looked like she welcoming the end of the world.

Emilia: "—What."

She said, the whole thing anticlimactic. Seeing her matured visage in the mirror, Emilia sighed.

Emilia: "I look less like Mother Fortuna than I thought, what a shame..."

After her sulky mutter, the world shattered into pieces. This happy, desired dream world, which she would inevitably have to part with, ended here—

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Emilia: "—Ah, haa."

After regaining consciousness, Emilia realized that she had fallen asleep while leaned against the wall.

She had slumped to sit on the floor, her legs splayed out aside her, relying on the wall engraved with Subaru's messages. She combed her fingers through her disheveled hair and imagined the sight of her own self.

So that was her appearance, feared by many as a Witch, and what Subaru constantly proclaimed to be cute or beloved.

Emilia, with her impoverished understanding of personal aesthetics, could not tell which party was correct.

However, Mother Fortuna was Emilia's conception of the prettiest and coolest of people. And so, she did not think nasty eyes were a bad thing, and actually she did not dislike how nasty Subaru's eyes looked either.

Emilia: "I just got back, this isn't the time for me to be thinking about weird stuff."

Putting her hands to her cheeks, Emilia pulled the breaks on her own thoughts.

It was so absurdly spineless of her. She had just ended the Trial in safety and returned, and just looking at Subaru's handwritten messages seriously got her that elated?

Emilia: "But... This does mean that the Second Trial is really over, right?"

Muttered Emilia to nobody as she got to her feet and began thinking about her results. Judging from Echidna's actions at the end, the Trial was most likely over. Unlike the First Trial, Emilia felt no sense of accomplishment in having overcome it.

But she indeed had wrested her nearly captivated heart away, and managed to return.

Emilia: "——"

Fortuna and Juice. As Emilia thought back on how close they had been, her heart ached. But she suppressed her sorrow, turning her back to the Trial room.

Supposing that the Third Trial was ready, it would require Emilia to exit and enter again, much like the Second Trial.

She would ride off her momentum to defeat the Third Trial and liberate Sanctuary.

For Subaru's sake, and for Ram's request, and to turn her boasts to Roswaal into reality, people needed her to take action.

Emilia: "—It's pitch-black already."

Passing through the dark corridor of the Tomb, her footsteps echoing off the stone floor, Emilia narrowed her eyes as she noticed how dim the light spilling into the ruin's entrance was.

Perhaps clouds were blocking out the moon, or the hazy glow originated from the starlight.

In Sanctuary, which would lose all sources of light at nightfall, only the natural lighting pouring down from above ripped through the darkness of the night.

Emilia: “—Huh?”

Emilia pondered as she walked. And once she stepped outside the Tomb, the horde of gazes focusing on herself caused her throat to instinctively hitch.

???: “W—we are in her presence!”

Somebody spoke up, a chatter instantly spreading through the crowd.

The stir only unfolded further before Emilia, who had flinched at the sight of the overwhelmingly large group of people focusing their entire attention on her.

—Those were the residents of Sanctuary. The people who lived in Sanctuary other than Garfiel and Ryuzu.

Emilia had not interacted any more than had been strictly necessary during her time here. Partly because Emilia's mental state had not been calm enough for it, partly because they had not been actively trying to interact with Emilia either.

Emilia was somewhat resigned when it came to people staring at her like this. The residents detested Emilia's lineage, but held expectations for her to liberate Sanctuary, and most of all, they had to ascertain whether she was someone worthy of leading them.

And so, Emilia had thought it impossible that they would show themselves to her in such great numbers before she succeeded in liberating Sanctuary. Emilia had been convinced that interaction with them would only ever come about once she had achieved in attaining results.

So then why were they all gathered here?

And why were their gazes towards Emilia— filled not with loathing, but strong expectation?

???: “Can’t say it’s the nicest of things...”

Before the bewildered Emilia, a girl stepped forward from the group of villagers. With her long, pink hair, this person was Ryuzu. She stepped forward to represent the villagers as she showed Emilia a smile.

Ryuzu: “Everyone here’s stuck at a standstill. Wondering what answer yer gonna give the Trial, and... worrying about what’ll happen to us after Sanctuary’s been freed.”

Emilia: “...I think it’s inevitable that you would. But how would this be «not the nicest of things»?”

Ryuzu: “Now that’s easy. Gar-bo and Su-bo’s fight, or yer argument with Ros-bo, or... Well, lotsa things. Everyone in Sanctuary’s been discussin’ them in detail, and from there...”

Emilia: “D—discussed it!?”

As she watched Ryuzu scratch her cheek, Emilia’s cheeks flushed red. Disregarding Subaru and Garfiel’s clash of wills, Emilia’s argument with Roswaal had just been her being pushy with her unrefined opinions. She had rationalized to herself that it would not be embarrassing for anyone to hear it, but now that she had found out someone had actually heard it, it made her embarrassed.

Emilia: “But, even if you did hear about it... Ryuzu-san, where did you?”

Ryuzu: “Hrm, so about that... Despite however I might look, I got incredibly sharp ears. With it, ya pretty much can’t keep anything a secret so long yer in Sanctuary.”

Emilia: “You do... Wow.”

Ryuzu’s confession of eavesdropping ended up impressing Emilia rather than angering her. Failing to notice how the young-looking old woman stuck out her tongue, Emilia nodded in recognition of the reason that had led so many people have assembled. And—

Villager: “E—Emilia-sama.”

Emilia: “Y—yes?”

Ryuzu: “Ya sound like ya met through a dating service.”

It was one of the villagers— considering his presence in Sanctuary, he was most likely a half-blood demi-human. His canines were slightly long, and his pupils slit. He looked about as old as Roswaal, perhaps a tad older, seeming somewhat tense as he stepped out of the crowd before Emilia.

Villager: “I am... No, we are... In all honesty, we are still undecided.”

Emilia: “———”

Villager: “About whether we may trust in you, or what it will mean to learn of the world outside Sanctuary. Plainly said, the outside holds a lot of things we do not know about, and that scares us. We were all born in this place, and have lived our entire lives here. We know nothing of the outside.”

This had been what Garfiel had also advocated, the way of life in Sanctuary. The four-hundred year barrier had forced the people inside to live here for generations. They had no way to escape, and perhaps they had no need to think about the outside, either.

But now the means to escape was in plain sight, and this completely foreign and unknown person named Emilia was attempting to liberate them. It was obvious that people would feel unease and rebellion. Moreover, it was doubtful that many could enter the outside world with complete confidence.

Emilia had feared that Garfiel’s anxieties had reflected the general opinion inside Sanctuary. And this man in front of her was saying things validating that fear.

Villager: “We could perhaps come into Roswaal-sama’s care outside, but how would that differ from our present circumstances...? To be clear, we are more anxious than hopeful. The change frightens us.”

Emilia: “...Mhm.”

Villager: “However.”

Emilia nodded and was bordering on lowering her gaze, when the man’s statement stopped her. The man straightened his posture before continuing, his expression tense.

Villager: “Everyone has heard Garfiel’s... has heard the boy’s voice.”

Emilia: "..."

Villager: "We know what that trooper was thinking, and how he felt. And know the exchanges between him and that black-haired young man, and between yourself and Roswaal-sama afterwards."

His back still straight, the man's expression twisted. Regretful, and near to tears. It filled Emilia's chest.

Villager: "I, sincerely speaking, thought it pathetic. A fourteen-year-old boy was so worried for us, and a child under twenty-years-old was howling at us like that. And even though Roswaal-sama had stated that you could not do it, we listened to your words as well. And so, Emilia-sama."

Emilia: "—Yes."

Villager: "No matter what the results may be, and no matter what may occur after this, I believe your effort to challenge the Trial is incredible. Worthy of respect. Not all of us share that sentiment, and not even I have entirely accepted you yet. But I request that we may witness it to completion."

It was needless to say what.

Bathed in his willful gaze, Emilia looked at those behind him, at the crowd of people accepting him as their representative, and nodded.

Emilia: "Understood. I will be sure to end everything safely and you will listen to what I have to say."

Villager: "Yes. That is a promise. Judging someone based off hearsay, without ever interacting with them, we are the last people who should be doing that, huh— Waagh!"

The man slumped his shoulders. When Ryuzu attacked by pinching his hip from behind.

The man sprung up and turned around in objection, but Ryuzu just snorted a laugh.

Ryuzu: "Ya sure went on a while, sure are serious, aren't ya. And ya fell back into talking casual halfway through. 'Cause y'ain't used to doing this."

Villager: "M—my apologies."

Ryuzu: "Anyway, there's what we're thinking. Apologies for the meddler."

With that charming little exchange, Ryuzu got the man to stand down. Emilia took a deep breath, something other than oxygen puffing up her chest. Ryuzu was giving her blessings, and the people of Sanctuary had come to see her efforts through. Who could estimate how greatly it had reassured her?

Emilia: “Thank you, Ryuzu-san. Now, I know I can try sooo hard.”

Ryuzu: “I see, I see. Well, good. Next one up should be the last Trial.”

Emilia: “Yes, it is— I’m going to challenge it right away.”

With the strength they had given her, Emilia turned around to face the Tomb.

But halfway through her turn she froze, remembering something, and glanced back to Ryuzu.

Emilia: “Ah, oh. Actually, Ryuzu-san, have you seen Ram? I’d like to tell her that I have finished the Second Trial, but—”

Ryuzu: “Ram’s left here to attend to some business. But she’s praying for yer good luck. She said, «Emilia-sama has her tasks, and Ram has hers. Let us see them both achieved.»”

It indeed sounded like Ram, and even though she knew it was just a report, it made her want to smile wryly.

Ram’s task— Where, and with whom, and would she achieve it?

Emilia felt something stir in her chest, but she consciously suppressed it.

Ram believed in her. And so, she would believe in Ram. Just how Subaru and the others had created a path for her, she wanted to reap their efforts and make a path as well.

Emilia: “I’m going.”

Ryuzu nodded in reply, and the villagers’ noise pushed her back. Filled with even stronger resolve than the first or second times, Emilia stepped into the Tomb. Where—

???: “*Face the impending calamity.*”

The final Trial was coming—

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Ram felt how her heartbeat had grown a touch distant in her chest.

She had never been bathed in such hostility from this person ever before.

Physical contact with him, exchanging words with him, being ordered by him. Those things were the epitome in joy for Ram, and her meaning in life. And so, the fact that she felt girlish elation, even when regarded with hostility by that person, overjoyed her.

Roswaal: "...Hooooooooow dare you show yooooooooourself here."

Muttered the tall man in front of Ram, glaring at her. His tantalizing voice made a sweet ache run through her brain.

Just by having his heterochromatic gaze on her, everything below her waist felt like it would shatter.

Although, this was obviously not the time to display such weak and girly things. A woman like that would merely be deemed useless and discarded.

Roswaal: "Nooooooooow then, what could you have coooooooooome here for?"

Ram: "—That is simple."

She replied as usual, her face expressionless and manner tranquil.

Her pink hair swaying, Ram drew her wand from beneath her skirt, before pointing it at the beauty before her— pointing it at her dearly beloved master.

Ram: "I have come to snatch you away from your Witch delusions."

And confessed that she was present to burn her loved one, who had been consumed by an insane love, with her own.

Arc 4 Chapter 125B - Starting as Revenge

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 14, Chapter 6 “Lies to Hope”, Part 6, and Volume 15, Chapter 4 “Next Time, I’m Sure We’ll Have Tea”, Part 1, and Volume 15, Chapter 6 “It Started with Revenge”, Parts 1-4

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by SummaryAnon – [Complete](#), Page 257

The wind was blowing. A single, strong gust whipped violently at their hair and clothes as they faced each other.

The setting was the outskirts of Sanctuary, near the hidden house where young Garfiel and Frederica had once lived, in an unpopulated and unremarkable meadow.

There were no residencies anywhere nearby, and even if there were, nobody would possibly pass by at this juncture. All the people of Sanctuary should be busy waiting for Emilia’s Trial results. To cheer Emilia on, and for Ram to exploit to clear out the crowd.

Roswaal: “Delusion, yooooooooou say.”

Ram did feel somewhat guilty about using Emilia like this, but refocused her attention as she saw Roswaal’s lips relax into a smile. He swept his long, navy hair down his back, then closing one eye and glaring at Ram with the yellow.

Roswaal: “When you are the one saying this, aware as you are of my feelings and goals, it’s quiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiite the sad thing to hear.”

Ram: “I have simply kept silent, but always thought so. As I naturally would.”

Roswaal: “Natural... Weeeeeeeeeell, I doooooooooo suppose so. From your perspective, it was a life of prolonged prostration and disgrace.”

Ram: “———”

Ram responded to Roswaal’s shrug by lowering her gaze.

She somewhat understood what he was trying to say. Of course she would. Ram had always been paying attention to Roswaal. She understood to a painful extent how he, recipient of her love and loyalty, would perceive her allegiance to him.

Roswaal: “So, the first thing you do once unshackled from the Contract is stray froooooooooom my plans. That would be what you did in supporting Subaru-kun and aiding in subjugating Garfiel, correct?”

Ram: “It carried two meanings, both for my objectives and to rectify Garf’s idiocy. Were I not there, I suspect that they would have not managed to do anything.”

Roswaal: “It does feel that everything worked out «in the end». Subaru-kun makes some rather thoughtless bets. When so many precious things are involved and at stake, I would never even think to make such an idiotic gamble for my precious one.”

It was something of a sermon. He was both cynical about Subaru’s decision, and insistent that his own ideas were the rational ones.

And honestly, there was nothing about Roswaal’s statement that Ram could refute. Many of Subaru’s actions had been utterly unplanned and haphazard. The luck of heaven had been on his side for the whole Garfiel affair, including how Ram participated in it.

Ram’s opinion of Subaru being a man of only good timing had not changed at all.

Should one focus only on the question of achieving a goal, then Roswaal’s ideas were far superior. That was, provided that the Gospel could be trusted.

Ram: “You wouldn’t make gambles... because utilizing the Gospel means prioritizing accuracy.”

Roswaal: “Eeeeeeeexactly. Although you seemed not to trust it and have aaaaaaaaaalways been adverse to it. Again, it was inevitable. You’ve been hoping for its writ to divert at any point it possibly could.”

Ram: “...I will not deny that.”

She could not deny that.

Ram truly was averse to the Gospel. But there was a huge discrepancy between Roswaal's perception and Ram's real motives as to why she disliked it.

And it racked Ram with sorrow that she had never let show on her face.

Roswaal: "Do you remember? The Contract that we formed, with the Gospel as our intermediary?"

Ram: "—That, provided that history is moving as stated in your Gospel, I would wager my life to serve you. In exchange..."

Roswaal: "...Should time proceed down a path diverged from the Gospel's writ, it means I have failed in my goals. Should I lose sight of them, my life loses all meaning. You are permitted to do whatever you wish with my husk."

Ram: "Your life or death rests upon Ram."

Roswaal: "That waaaaaaaaas the Contract."

With that, Roswaal retrieved a black book from his breast pocket. He cradled the thick tome close, stroking its cover as he sighed.

Roswaal: "It must have been truly long and painful for you."

Ram: "——"

Roswaal: "After all... you had to spend your life swearing reluctant loyalty to a man partly responsible for the destruction of your birthplace. Contrary to your prayers, your heart delights when in contact with me... It must have been agony. My deepest apologies for being so aaaaaaaaapathetic."

Roswaal weaved spiteful words to wound Ram.

"Partly responsible for the destruction of your birthplace", hearing that sentence, pain and memories of her hometown, and family, in flames passed through her chest.

The oni had a low population even for demi-humans, but in exchange, possessed incredible strength.

Ram's race had gathered up their scant numbers and established a village deep in the mountains, only to then be exterminated overnight between fire and knives, leaving Ram and as the only survivors.

She had formed the Contract with Roswaal the morning after the fire, as she gazed over the scorched village in a daze. Ram had accepted the Contract for the sake of survival.

Without ever knowing anything, and equally without Ram ever telling anything.

Ram: “———?”

Feeling an inexplicable sense of awryness and faint aching in her head, Ram furrowed her brows. She felt as if there was an unnatural vacuum somewhere in her memories. That there was something that had to be there, instead being obfuscated by a network of lies, telling her that no such thing existed. Even though Ram's memories made no sense without it——

Roswaal: “This despicable longing within you, and the lust for revenge that your true heart fostered. Even with these contrary desires squabbling within you, you proved yourself to be a truly eeeeeeeexcellent pawn. Just how extensively have I used you, with your obedient conformity to the Gospel?”

Ram: “...”

While Ram searched her memories to try and find what felt off, Roswaal continued his speech. “This isn't the time for this”, she thought as she aborted her search for the vacuum. She faced Roswaal, who spoke sweetly as he praised her loyalty.

But the glances he flashed Ram with began to adopt another kind of sentiment.

Roswaal: “But who wooooooooould have thought that you'd betray me and ally with Subaru-kun. Do you comprehend how much grief I have suffered because of this?”

Ram: “...I have not defied the terms of our Contract. Should the world proceed on a course differing from the Gospel, I will adhere not to your words, but to my own heart. The Contract... If I had disobeyed it, then I would not have escaped unharmed.”

Putting her hand to her chest, Ram asserted the legitimacy of her actions.

Naturally, this Contract between Ram and Roswaal had not been a simple spoken-word promise. Spells were engraved on both of their souls, and they would suffer more than appropriate penalty should they defy the Contract's terms. Since this had not happened, Ram's heart had not defied the Contract.

But Roswaal gave a big shake of his head.

Roswaal: "Thaaaaaaaat is what I'm referring to. Considering that you have not been punished for disobeying the Contract in this situation... Your soul believes without the slightest of doubt that you are obeying the Contract. And I must find that a terribly unfortunate judgement."

Ram: "What do you mean?"

Roswaal: "It is simple— The Gospel's writ had yet to diverge. The Contract between you and I will only truly reach its completion further from now, in the future."

His voice low as he looks Ram in the eye, Roswaal asserted his point.

The statement made even Ram, who was usually expressionless, tense her cheeks. What she was hearing differed greatly from what the Contract's spell would acknowledge.

Even with all those conditions in place, Roswaal's stubborn heart was not surrendering in the least.

Ram: "The writ has not diverged? Barusu will not challenge the Tomb to liberate Sanctuary, and Emilia-sama is not doing anything to bring about snowfall. How could you state that the writ has not diverged in this situation, Roswaal-sama... Has something happened?"

Roswaal: "Nothing at all, it's theeeeeeee same as ever. While yes, it's true that neither of the things I stated have come into fruition... They still may yet."

Ram: "That will not happen. Barusu has left Sanctuary, and Emilia-sama is defeating the Trials. To state that matters will end up conforming to the writ... is this the tantrum of an obstinate child?"

Roswaal: "I am quite a mature adult and so I can deny being an obstinate child, but I cannot deny that I am floundering. llllllllllind, here is my useless tantrum— Endless and spanning over four-centuries, a peeeeeeeeeerpetual stretch of tantrum."

Changing his course, Roswaal asserted that his own actions amounted to a “tantrum”. The clown laughed from the back of his throat, his expression twisted in insane ecstasy as he slapped his knees, praising it like a masterpiece.

Roswaal: “A tantrum, exactly, it’s a tantrum! That’s the punchline! Is there any word that could describe this obsession of mine more accurately? Noooooooooope, there isn’t! Tantrum... tantrum... Hahahaaaaaa, wonderful. It had never even occurred to me.”

Ram: “Roswaal-sama!”

Roswaal: “A man throwing a tantrum in dependent obsession, and a servant whose lust for revenge against a madman has morphed into loyalty towards him. Our circumstances are truuuuuuly crooked and comedic. Hoooooooooowever, calling my actions a tantrum will do nothing to change my intentions. You have acted prematurely.”

Roswaal’s insane smile disappeared as he presents the Gospel to Ram, so she could see it.

Roswaal: “No matter what you may believe, the Contract remains unchanged. Until she overcomes the Tomb’s Trials, nothing has diverged from the writ that Natsuki Subaru will liberate Sanctuary. And even should she not bring snowfall, no deviation will come to the writ assuming that I cause snow to fall.”

Ram: “———”

Roswaal: “You may appeal to the terms of the Contract, but I am also acting in equal compliance. And so we sit upon parallel lines. The time has yet to come for you to enact your revenge.”

Roswaal lightly tossed the book, catching it in his other hand before stashing it in his breast pocket. Flickering flames appeared atop his outstretched right arm. Roswaal showed off how the flames changed color from red, to blue, to green, narrowing his eyes.

Roswaal: “You are still subject to the terms of your employment. You have acted impertinently as my servant and as such you will face punishment. Had you truly believed that the world had already diverged from the Gospel, then waiting for two more days was all you had to do. I would have presented myself to you without resistance. Hastiness is not a good trait.”

Roswaal continued with “Although”, while shaking his head in lamentation.

Roswaal: “I do understand your desire to destroy me as soon as possible.”

Ram: “...So you truly do understand nothing.”

Roswaal: “———?”

Ram closed her eyes, murmuring feebly in reply to Roswaal’s cynical smile.

Beneath her eyelids rested a wave of complex emotion, never to show on her face. By closing her eyes, Ram could see her own way of life, which she had pledged to never show to anybody.

She raised her head, Mana converging at the tip of her wand, poised this entire time.

Ram: “There is no meaning in having you should it be after the Contract is fulfilled. After you have been destroyed, there is no meaning at all.”

Roswaal: “——Come.”

Ram: “As you wish.”

——Flames of vibrant hue crashed into invisible blades of wind.

With waves of heat surging through their Sanctuary, the oni and the warlock had begun their crooked dance.

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Emilia perceived the exact instant the Trial started.

Her five senses vanished, and she forfeited the general concept of having a body. Her sensory organs departed from her control, leaving her as only a mind floating helplessly in space—— That was what she was right now, merely a soul.

This one obviously differed in nature from the previous Trials.

Emilia: “———”

She could not speak. She had no mouth. No eyes either, but strangely enough, she was able to perceive the world.

Or no. You could say that she perceived the world, but it was not coherent enough you could confidently call it a world.

Emilia's consciousness floated in a void of darkness. She could recognize her own self regardless because of the many lights speckling this dark. The dim lights came in many colors, splayed about in considerable number. They resembled the glow of a Micro Spirit, but they transmitted a decisively different vibe from the Spirits.

They may resemble Micro Spirits, but their light was a closer match to that from magic ore. Regardless, considering these surrounding lights had scattered around to circle Emilia, she felt that she would not lose sight of the world.

Emilia: "——"

Surrounded by lights, and relieved that she had not been left alone, Emilia started feeling more and more confused about the utter lack of events taking place here. The dim lights simply floated there in their positions, not doing anything at all. Echidna had been showing up at the start of these Trials to explain what had been going on, but this time she was not present to act as a guide.

Time simply passed on— though Emilia could not tell how differently time flowed on the inside and outside of the Tomb, she knew that doing nothing would lead to nothing.

Emilia: "——?"

"I have to do something", thought Emilia, and a change occurred. Emilia's consciousness, formerly fixed in place and immobile, moved over to another spot— close enough to the lights that she could probably touch them.

She had no physical body, yet she could touch light. It was a weird sensation.

But she had no other way to express herself. If she did, then maybe it was possible that she was simply be invisible to herself, and instead have a body constructed of primal magic— a mass of Od.

If her Od was what held her consciousness and soul, then that would perhaps explain her current condition.

Reaching some amount of agreement, Emilia moved to validate her ideas by heading for one of the lights. There were more than twenty of these scattered lights. With no particular reason behind it, Emilia reached out for the light glowing a dim silver.

And the instant her Od touched the light— she saw it.

???: “Hate, hate, absolutely hate you. Me, I loathe you. I really do. All of it is entirely true. Ever since we first met... I’ve downright hated you.”

Emilia: “———!?”

Immediately following the voice, a vivid scene slipped into Emilia’s perception. Beneath an overwhelmingly giant sun, in a burnt field, standing beside a massive and dilapidated building, bathed in crimson sunlight, was a girl with blood wetting her silver hair— Emilia.

It was her fully-grown self, who she had only witnessed in the Second Trial.

And she looked woeful as she stood before the ruin, assaulting someone with her words.

Emilia: “I’ve had this thought countless times, and denied it countless times, but... Yes, a nightmare really did catch up to me. And so, I will say it.”

Emilia: “———”

Emilia: “Maybe we really shouldn’t have met after all.”

A tear streamed down from the corner of her amethyst eye. It trailed down to her cheek, fell from her chin, and the instant before it struck the ground, the world burst into nothing.

Emilia: “———”

She swallowed her breath. As just a mass of Od, she was incapable of something so dexterous. All Emilia could do was to accept the scene she had just witnessed.

What was that light? What was this scene?

That had definitely been Emilia, but she did not remember that event at all. Or perhaps that had been an impossible scene, like the one in the Second Trial.

Emilia: “———”

“It’s not”, thought Emilia. She calmed her chaotic mind, searched through her memory, and remembered. The words she had heard in the Tomb when entering the Third Trial.

“First face your past”, “Witness the uncomeatable present”. And now the third one. Yes, it was, “Face the impending calamity”.

Impending calamity— So, the future?

She had seen the past and a present, and finally, she was seeing the future. So, was this the baptism shown to those challenging these alternate worlds by the Trial?

Did that mean that Emilia would eventually meet this future? Where she was in such a dismal place, crying as she conveyed her regret for meeting somebody?

Emilia: “———”

Emilia used her feelings of denial to dispel her unease, recovering a superficial level of calm. But, once her mind registered the darkness again, another change occurred.

The silver light that Emilia’s Od had just touched disappeared. A vacuum filled the space the light once occupied, as it was now missing. Emilia was puzzled by this, but promptly realized what it meant.

If each of these lights represented a future, then Emilia needed to touch every single one of these futures before she would be freed.

—If this was a Trial, then she would have to make some kind of choice after she had seen all the futures. If Echidna was waiting anywhere, then it would be there.

Which meant— Emilia must witness over twenty futures.

Emilia: “———”

Would they be differing futures, or would they all be fragments of the same future she just saw?

While feeling her non-existent heart wilting, Emilia reached for the neighboring light. This one was blue, reminiscent of something vast and deep, like an ocean——

???: “You’re absolutely right. That kid was our enemy, and our wounds were deep¹⁸⁶. If we withdrew here, considering that neither of us can heal, maybe we wouldn’t have been saved.”

???: “In that case...”

???: “But they were just a kid—— And isn’t that enough?”

Again, the scene changed. Now she witnessed a thick forest, two people standing at the edge of a steep cliff. She could not see their faces. But she knew both of their voices. One was very familiar, and though the other one was not, she did remember it.

The two were facing off before that cliff, one of them kneeling, the other looking down at the kneeling party. Emilia felt like both looked horribly miserable.

???: “You... You are a hero. A hero... is all, you can ever be!”

???: “I...”

???: “Why thank you so very much for your help¹⁸⁷!”

One silhouette reached their hand out to the other, who turned their face away and left those inconsiderate words of gratitude.

It felt like it had been a definite farewell between these two people. A goodbye laced with only irreparable woe and disappointment.

¹⁸⁶ It is not clear who exactly was wounded, but from context, the party of the person talking is the most likely option.

¹⁸⁷ This line (助けてくれて、ありがとう!!) could also be interpreted as “Thank you for saving me”.

The world began fading away again, and Emilia's consciousness returned to the dark space.

Emilia: "———"

Emilia had not been present in that scene at all. She knew who those people were, but it felt odd that she herself had been absent.

She was meant to be facing these lights while conceiving them as futures.

So why on earth was it showing futures where she was absent, or scenes that she would not be present for?

—Was she being shown how her decisions may affect the future of those around her?

If so, then these scenes only presented one possibility out of many. It was telling her to witness how her decisions would impact those other than herself.

Emilia: "———"

The blue light vanished as the silver light had done. Twenty lights remained.

—Each one of them carried the weight of a choice.

Steeling herself, Emilia reached out to see the outcome of her decisions through. In the next future, and the future after that, Emilia's decisions awaited.

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With a swish of her wand, she created and unleashed a blade of wind. Invisible and inaudible, the whirling blade closed in on its target's throat as an assassin aiming at its target's feet.

Roswaal: "Is that all?"

But Roswaal easily evaded the imperceptible attack by nimbly jumping away.

Naturally. He was the head of the renowned Mathers family of sorcerers, a rare breed of magician proficient in all six attributes of magic. For Roswaal L. Mathers, perceiving others' manipulation of Mana was mere child's play. Even wind magic and its invisible blades was as visible to Roswaal as fire in the night.

Roswaal: "My turn."

With a swing of Roswaal's arm, three fireballs of differing hues rained down upon Ram.

A red fire, a blue fire, and a green fire—all three of them pursued Ram as she jumped backward, tailing her in annoying fashion. She ran backwards, her breath slightly ragged, as she unleashed another spike of magic. The blade of wind struck the three flames simultaneously, Ram believing it would snuff them out, but instead they each reacted in differing ways.

Ram: "———!?"

The instant the red flame took the hit it combusted into a pillar of fire, like it had taken a bath of oil. The blue flame was easily sliced to pieces by wind, its embers shooting out in all directions. The green flame looked like it had been engulfed in wind, only to then absorb the wind Mana and change its shape, morphing into a snake of green fire slithering across the ground in Ram's pursuit.

The fire pillar blazed at Ram, who kicked off from a massive tree to avoid the blue flames, and then tumbled across the ground to dodge the green flame's fangs before again striking the fire-snake with her blades of wind.

The snake bursted into small flares, which scattered over the meadow, smoldering to nothing.

Roswaal: "Oh myyyy... That was only one bout of magic, and yet you seem quite wounded."

Ram: "Haaa... haaaaaa..."

Roswaal: "If you acted with belief that you could win, then I must say that your estimations are raaaaaaaather naive. Why yes, I am currently devoting most of my magic to the algorithm to manipulate the weather. Hoooooooooowever, I am not so careless to accordingly neglect what is aaaaaaaaat hand."

Roswaal tilted his head as he watched Ram, her shoulders heaving with every breath, and spread flames to encircle them.

He created the three hues of flame again, which took the form of giant fireballs in his hand before moving to revolve around him. Their numbers compounded with every revolution, gaining speed. It only took a few seconds before Roswaal was veiled in a vortex of chromatic fireballs.

Roswaal: “This is one flame of each color. Ten flames of each type, for a total of thirty fireballs. You will not manage to dispose of them all with your current abilities.”

Ram: “———”

Roswaal: “Although, if you intended to confront me while my combat strength was limited, it was most foolish to aid in the fight against Garfiel. My abilities may be diminished, but that means nothing when your abilities are diminished as well. I can tell from the Mana overflowing from you— You transformed, didn’t you?”

Ram settled her breathing and answered Roswaal’s question with a glance. Perhaps having expected no reply, Roswaal shrugged.

Roswaal: “Of course transforming without my aid would turn out like this. You may challenge me with only a fraction of Mana, but you will approach your limit within a minute of fighting. If we view this as you expending your best efforts for the sake of your goal, it’s an affront to the eyes.”

Ram: “An affront... to the eyes, you say?”

Roswaal: “liiiiiiindeed, an affront to the eyes. You had stated this before. When I said that you needed to wait for only two days to see if the world had utterly diverged from the Gospel, you stated that would be pointless. I had been wondering what you meant at first... but after thinking about it, I came to a solution.”

Her breathing was calming down, but neither her stamina nor magic was being replenished. Roswaal knew this, and so he was stopping his attack on Ram to have this conversation.

It would be different if she started being an obstacle, but Roswaal did not intend to kill Ram. And Ram had to feel that this complacency of his was humiliating.

Roswaal: “If we take your goal to be revenge, then the answer is simple. You could brutalize me once I am a cripple, but that would not appease you. That is the only reason I can conceive that would make you abandon your chance for definite revenge by challenging me now. You think that you will only achieve revenge when you slay me, partway through my own goals.”

Ram: “———”

Roswaal: “That was partly my mistake for pressuring you into a choice at a critical moment, when you were still young. It may have caused you to panic, after time passed and you realized thaaaaaaat fact. And so, you have gone berserk to ensure the opportunity would not escape you. Though, the result is laid bare for all to see.”

Ram: “—Ah.”

A sound slipped from Ram’s throat. A hoarse, breathy sigh.

Roswaal’s odd-colored eyes remained fixed on Ram, making sure not to miss a single one of her actions. With that gaze upon her, Ram thought back on everything she had done for the last half of her life.

Although she had always known it, recognizing it again, after all this time, did prick her. Feeling that pain, Ram opened her mouth. Wide, so wide, as she looks up at the sky——

Ram: “Ahahahahahahaha!”

Roswaal: “——Ram?”

They were mirroring each other.

As she thought of how Roswaal had cackled earlier, the laughing Ram only felt more thrilled.

Her reasoning was entirely different to Roswaal’s, but yes, indeed, it was amusing. She had to laugh. That’s right, of course. Because, in the end——

Ram: “After all those interactions, after all that contact, you still have not realized how the other party feels.”

Dense, insensitive, no, it was something on an entirely different level.

Stubborn. Fixated. He had determined that it would never happen, and so had not moved an inch. To him, it was inconceivable that feelings that started as revenge would transform into love with the passage of time.

Ram: "I have been by your side because of the Contract."

Roswaal: "Yes, indeed you have. In that smoldering village, you and I formed a Contract of vassalage. I still remember how, even without your horn, your eyes blazed wet with wrath. And so, I sealed that away through the Contract, and redirected your fervor into loyalty. Although, I did believe that a day like this would someday come..."

Ram: "You are right. You were right. I wished to murder you. But you stole that opportunity from me, and I proceeded to spend my days in the mansion with this inexplicable loyalty and..."

Roswaal: "Unshackled from the Contract, today, you have decided to sate your desire for rev—"

Roswaal was lining up his theories. It was hilarious.

"It is truly as if he pays no attention to anything except his own feelings", she thought.

Ram: "Roswaal-sama, I am in love with you."

Roswaal: "———"

Ram: "I wound up falling in love with you. That is why there is no purpose in attaining you once you are broken. That is not the Roswaal-sama that I desire."

Roswaal's eyes shot open as his body froze solid.

He was stunned, as if he had truly, seriously not anticipated this in the slightest.

He promptly shook his head, attempting to come up with words, but his lips merely quivered with nothing meaningful coming out of them.

Ram: "Is something the matter?"



Illustration from Volume 15, coloring by Xarlasar ([source](#))

Roswaal: “Of course there... Are you, mocking me? After all of this, mocking me? You have recognized that your strength is lacking, and so are attempting to shake me mentally, and...”

Ram: “How could I possibly believe that such tricks would work on you, Roswaal-sama? I am simply stating what I truly feel.”

Roswaal: “That only makes it even less conceivable!”

Stomping the ground, Roswaal roared. Reflecting his agitated mental state, the shroud of fireballs flew into disarray. They soon came to a halt, floating at various points around the surroundings as Roswaal glared at Ram.

Roswaal: “You love me? What on earth are you saying? You detest me. I’m a man you detest. For you, I am a man partially responsible for the destruction of your birthplace. You are meant to hate me so much you would like to murder me!”

Ram: “I did at first. But not now. Now, I love you.”

Roswaal: “This idiotic...! Who would, think such a cheap...!”

Feelings that had started as revenge must proceed to remain revenge.

Feelings that had become yearning must only have ever started as yearning.

Roswaal stubbornly believed that people’s desires and feelings could not change. And so he could not believe that Ram had changed her mind so dramatically as to alter her way of life.

Roswaal: “What about your revenge! Did you not pledge it! Did you not face your ashen village, and swear upon the souls of your dead brethren that you would accomplish revenge!”

Ram: “I do think it is wrong to do this to my brethren, and thinking of my birthplace does pain my heart. However, I cannot change that I have fallen in love. Ram is only prioritizing her own feelings over those of the dead.”

Roswaal: “———!”

Ram: “And you are not my direct foe, Roswaal-sama. Should my lust for revenge cloud my vision, that would make me even more shameful... That would be my excuse.”

Roswaal was utterly lost for words.

It would be an unreasonable demand to make him understand the current situation. Roswaal was a man who had gone for a very, very long time while sticking to his feelings. Wholeheartedly, persistently devoting his love to one single person, doing everything he could to make his wishes come true.

His emotions, his heart, and his belief that things ought to be this way were far too strong. And so he could not understand feelings that changed over time, or understand that strength.

There was really nothing she could do about the fact she found even this aspect of him adorable.

Ram: “I shall never allow you to become invalid.”

Roswaal: “You are contradicting yourself. No matter what your feelings are— No, even more so presuming that their nature is exactly what you stated, I do not understand why you are challenging me now. If the Gospel is to diverge from the writ, then I will lose my purpose in life and undergo heartbreak. You are aware of this, so why!?”

Ram: “Because this is the moment. Barusu, Emilia-sama, Garf. Now that all of them have brought your heart close to wavering, I face my single and only moment of opportunity.”

As long as the Contract between Roswaal and Ram existed, Ram could not defy Roswaal. Ram was currently disobeying Roswaal because her soul had judged that she was freed from the Contract, as Roswaal had pointed out.

But was that really the case? If one party believes the conditions to fit, then they are exempted as a target for the Contract. Does the system of Contracts truly possess such a vague and loose set of criteria?

Therefore, Ram extended her pleas. That she was not the only one who believed that the requirement to disregard the Contract, the divergence between the world and the Gospel, had been met. She hoped that some corner of Roswaal’s mind had noticed the same thing.

That was why this situation had been brought about.

Roswaal looked utterly confused as Ram turned to face him, held her breath, and dashed forth. She drew her wand, forcing out the dregs of Mana she possessed to cast a spell.

Roswaal: “———! Useless!”

Ram’s actions caused Roswaal to dispel his turmoil and order his floating fireballs to strike and stall her. But not a single one of the fireballs hit her as she lowered herself to the ground, their heat doing nothing more than searing her skin.

Ram had fulfilled the criteria needed to follow the Gospel’s future until now— and he could not decide if he should discard her or not. The fact that he could not perceive Ram’s designs was also a factor.

Perhaps he might even regret killing her.

If so, then that alone was enough to elate her so wonderfully to make her forget her earlier sorrow.

Ram: “—El, Fula!!”

The power of wind was concentrated, and invisible destruction detonated before her.

Roswaal had prepared himself in fighting posture, but he was not her target. She aimed for the ground beneath, rupturing it open and drowning out his field of vision with a great explosion of dirt.

Roswaal: “Do you think this smokescreen will...!”

Ram: “———!”

One sweep of Roswaal’s arm cut through the momentary veil of dirt into pieces. The barrier vanished, and as Ram watched it, she exhaled sharply and concentrated power to her forehead.

Ram: “...Ah, guh.”

Agony. Her vision drowned in scarlet as bloody tears spilled from her bloodshot eyes. Her muscles, her bones, both creaked as she heard the noise of her tendons ripping. She ignored all that, gritting her teeth so hard they broke as she stepped forth. The ground beneath her shattered, and in that instant, Ram had transcended the limits of mortals.

Roswaal had already batted the screen of dirt away— and Ram soared at him, so fast she took nary a single moment.

He noticed Ram, but before his eyes could even shoot open, she moved. Her outstretched arm reached for Roswaal's torso, and he swallowed his breath as he realized that her hand was contacting his chest.

Demonization— There was nothing else that could have increased Ram's abilities like this.

Although it was only momentary, Ram's strength currently exceeded the limits of the human body. Roswaal had to realize that it had been a blunder, thinking how she could shatter his ribcage and pop his heart. However,

Roswaal: “—What?”

With the shock and pain being registered, Roswaal could only blubber in astonishment.

In the blink of an eye, Ram had skidded to a stop about ten meters away from Roswaal. She faced down, vomiting blood as she fell to her knees.

Roswaal furrowed his brows, unable to comprehend the purpose behind Ram's actions. But once he saw what was found in Ram's hands, his expression instantly shifted.

Roswaal: “That!”

Ram: “To, me... this is, the root of all evil.”

His face pale, Roswaal began sprinting over. Ram responded merely by glancing up before, without any hesitation at all, giving a swing of her arm.

—And the Gospel in her hands went flying into one of the simmering green flames.

Roswaal: “———!”

Roswaal screeched mutely, but the blaze swallowed the Gospel nonetheless, becoming even hotter. Alongside a satisfying boom, the ancient book transformed into a pile of green ash.

Ram watched on with a smile, as if she had been yearning to see this for a very long time.

Ram: “—Now, finally,”

Ram sighed in satisfaction, her cheeks growing flush.

—The very next instant, a fireball thrown out of rage pierced through her petite frame.

Arc 4 Chapter 126B - We'll Next Meet at a Tea Party

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 15, Chapter 4 “Next Time, I’m Sure We’ll Have Tea”, Parts 2-4 (half-way, heavily changed), and Volume 15, Chapter 6 “It Started with Revenge”, Parts 1-4

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by SummaryAnon – [Complete](#), Page 272

—She viewed the future.

???: “—Without that, do you not have even a sword to swing. Thief!!”

???: “Witness. The victor remains I.”


???: “Subaru, Emilia-neesama, I know you must be so tired. I’m sorry. But I’m going to wind up being a burden too. I’m sorry. All the thanks I’d wanted to say could never be enough...”

—With every colored light she touched, Emilia would see a different future.

???: “To think that someone I wanted to kill so much was actually a kind person, what an incredible nightmare.”

???: “There are feelings which must not be spoken. Does it satisfy you, now that they have come to light?”

???: “Does this make you feel that you have seen your promise through? If it does... If it does, then I was better off bound and dead in that cave! If I was going to see this dawn, then I should have just offed myself sooner...! Damnit, damnit!”

???: “God I’m sorry. I’m sorry for being so weak. God I’m sorry. I could not make the kill, god I’m sorry. Now  will always be alone forever. God I’m sorry for being so weak...”

—Woe, ire, death, rebirth, farewells, meetings, the future arrived in many forms.

???: *"Yes, yes... my dear grandchild... must've grown up well..."*

???: *"I shall never perish to such nonsense as a curse¹⁸⁸!"*

???: *"It's simply that I realized something. That along the path up to today, I haaaaaaaaaad not been walking alone."*

???: *"How come there is no soul inside!?"*

—Must the future be only despair? Would there nothing but sorrow and suffering?

???: *"Just as promised, I'm fuckin' killin' ya! Yeh!?? NATSUKI SUBARUUUUUUUU!!"*

???: *"Am I being so covetous? Am I saying anythin' that indulgent? Nobody dies, nobody weeps. What's so complicated 'bout it?"*

???: *"After all, we must bleed ourselves to our very last drop to redeem ourselves, yes?"*

???: *"Right and wrong and good and evil's all a bunch of bullshit. You're stopping right there. Say it's the Dragon or say it's the Witch, if anyone's blocking the way then I'm... then we're, gonna crush them¹⁸⁹."*

—Then, had it been wrong of her to choose this path? Had she been mistaken to wish for any favors?

???: *"—I believe that to pray for one's requests is arrogance. Prayers are for when you seek forgiveness."*

—In the final world of light, a girl that Emilia had never seen awake and speaking talked.

"I'd like to have a proper conversation with her", Emilia thought.

That sentiment was more than enough to deny the rejection of everything.

¹⁸⁸ It is unclear whether the speaker is talking about themselves, or someone else.

¹⁸⁹ This phrase can have a myriad of different meanings. I have opted to partially use DiscountAnon/Nanashi's alternative as it conforms better to the Light Novel's version.

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Emilia's vision cleared, and she realized she was in a breezy meadow.

A hillock with a white table. Emilia sat herself upon a white chair, unable to remember what happened only a few seconds ago. But she did know that she was in a dream world.

Emilia: "Echidna?"

If anyone was going to greet her at the end of the Trial, then it was going to be its supervisor, Echidna. Emilia casted her gaze around in search of her.

But even though she could see that the field stretched as far as the horizon, she sighted no shelters or anything indicating the presence of people. And if she left the table to walk around, she might lose it from sight and never find it again.

She was definitely right here in this spot, but it strangely felt like she might fall off the horizon. Emilia took deep breaths to calm herself down, and made up her mind to start moving if nobody was around. Perhaps there was an exit somewhere. She would find that, and get out of this place. She had nothing to gain by wasting time here.

???: "It's been like this forever, haa. But why is it that these situations, huu... always end up being my post, haa? I can't say I'm thrilled with it, huu."

Emilia: "...Ah."

Seeing the ball of hair that had suddenly appeared across the table from her, Emilia froze. She stared at this thing before her in shock, still halfway into standing up.

Her breath had been taken away.

???: "Mm... An understandable reaction, haa. And the correct one, huu. The kid from before must have been a tad obtuse, haa."

Emilia: "——"

Every word that escaped this person's mouth was mixed with a gloomy sigh.

It was a rather lethargic woman with overwhelmingly long magenta hair, wearing a black robe. Her comments were not thorny at all, and she looked relaxed as anything.

—But Emilia regardless felt a pressure so intense it was practically strangling her. If this person felt like it, then anything above Emilia's neck would disappear in an instant.

Emilia had recalled her past, and could now manipulate such a vast quantity of Mana that her body was unable to contain all of it. Even though she had gained a massive boost in her capabilities as a solo fighter, she felt that she had no chance against this woman.

She would kill Emilia as easily as swatting a fly— and Emilia knew this.

Woman: "You don't need to be so wary, huu. I'm not looking to hurt you, or to get hurt, haa. Since that'd be a drag, huu. But Echidna just doesn't want to see you so she, haa... forced me here, huu."

Emilia: "I... I, see..."

Emilia nodded timidly.

The pressure wreathed around this woman showed no signs of letting up. Nothing had changed about her ability to easily decimate Emilia. But if nothing was going to change about the fact that the woman could kill Emilia whenever she wished, then it would be the same regardless of whether she was scared or not.

Emilia inhaled, held her breath, and exhaled. Doing this, she forced herself to calm down.

Emilia: "You're here in Echidna's place... so you are also a Witch?"

Woman: "—I see, haa. So you're braver than I thought, huu. You're not timid during the critical moments, haa. You might be taking after your mother, huu."

Emilia: "You know about my Mother?"

Woman: "I can't tell you anything, but yes, haa."

The unexpected relation made Emilia gulp, but the woman looked utterly exhausted after that comment. Emilia could pursue that information, but she probably wouldn't get anything.

Emilia decided to temporarily shelve the topic of her mother, for the time being. She had seen her past, seen an impossible future, and now Fortuna and Juice's light remained shining in her heart.

For now, it was more than enough.

Emilia: "What would you like me to call you instead of Echidna?"

Woman: "It's nice when children don't throw tantrums, huu. I'd like Typhon to get a lesson from you, haa. My name's Sekhmet, huu. As you've guessed, I'm the Witch of Sloth, haa."

Sekhmet leaned her body onto the table, looking up as she gave a faint smile.

The bags under her eyes and the unhealthy-looking paleness of her skin were something of a concern, but her features were attractive, and she was a beautiful woman. Still, the expression "Witch" and the ghastly aura she emanated indicated that she was not anyone ordinary for sure.

Sekhmet: "I really couldn't, huu... care less about how our names as Witches are treated in the present, haa. So that doesn't matter, huu. I just want to get this request done with, haa... and settle down into self-indulgent slumber, huu."

Emilia: "Hmm, if it's such a bother for you... Could no one else have done it? Echidna doesn't have to be the one if she doesn't want to... but aren't there other Witches?"

Sekhmet: "You're not going to, haa... get a conversation out of anyone else, huu. Minerva's the only one who could manage an actual conversation here, haa... and she can't show her face to you, huu."

Emilia: "Minerva..."

Sekhmet spoke with terrible tempo owing to her pauses to sigh. But hearing that she offered a better conversation than the other Witches made Emilia terrified of even imagining what the others were like.

But even that sentiment was overpowered by the strong feelings Emilia had for the word "Minerva".

Emilia: "Minerva..."

Once again, Emilia muttered to herself as she tilted her head. The word felt horribly nostalgic, something that would jog her memories. But that said, Emilia could not remember hearing it in any of her memories up until now, or in any of her recovered memories either.

But it was a terribly mysterious name, one that could evoke thoughts of someone very close to her.

Sekhmet: “No sense talking about someone who isn’t here, haa. Anyway, I’m just here to pass a message along from Echidna, huu.... and then I’m leaving it up to you to come up with ideas to end the Trial, haa. Pretty easy job for me, huu.”

Emilia: “Erm, thank you for your hard work...?”

Sekhmet: “I’ll pretend that worked, haa. Now, listen closely, huu.”

Sekhmet called out to the brooding Emilia, and put her head sideways upon the table. She gazed up at Emilia, and with a sigh, set her right hand on the table too.

Sekhmet: “In the Third Trial, haa... You have seen the future, huu. Those futures are possibilities of what will happen, haa... in this future where you decide to overcome this Tomb, huu.”

Emilia: “Possible, futures.”

Sekhmet: “There is a chance they will all happen, haa... and a chance none will happen, huu. Though, considering Echidna’s personality, haa... even I can tell that the futures you saw weren’t the nicest ones, huu.”

What did the other Witches think of Echidna? At the very least, it seemed like Sekhmet considered Echidna to be someone mean. Emilia could not exactly say much on that. Sekhmet’s opinion of Echidna was actually a little worse than what Emilia figured, but it was difficult to demand a worse appraisal than “mean Witch” from Emilia.

Sekhmet: “The future splits into infinite pathways, and so derives possibilities, haa. But the futures you saw were all seeds thick with tragedy, huu. After they sprout and bud, what will blossom out of them, haa? Are you prepared to doggedly walk a path of poison blooms that may leave everyone unhappy, huu?”

Emilia: “———”

Keeping silent, Emilia gazed earnestly at Sekhmet. Sekhmet looked fatigued after giving such a long speech. But she soon furrowed her brows upon noticing Emilia's gaze.

Sekhmet: "...I'm pretty sure I already gave you the question, haa."

Emilia: "Huh, what? That was the question? I answer that, and the Trial will end?"

Sekhmet: "That's what it seems, huu. Though, considering your goal, you could say that the Trial was over the instant you managed to get here, haa."

Emilia grinned wryly, as Sekhmet made it sound like a free round.

Emilia did not mean any ill. But the issue was just so trivial it had surprised her. After all, it was obvious how Emilia would respond.

Emilia: "Worlds that end tragically for everybody. No, I'm not prepared to see those at all."

It reminded her of memories that ripped at her chest, that clawed at her heart.

In that world of darkness, amid those colored lights, Emilia had heard their wails times upon times.

Emilia: "These are futures where everyone might meet a sad end. In the dark world before this, I saw a lot of them. Where everyone was crying, suffering, angry. I don't know the details of what happened, but I don't want to see a future like that."

Sekhmet: "But, I can assure that if you continue on the path you're on, huu... it's highly likely that such things will happen, haa. Is that going to make you flee, huu?"

Emilia: "No. That's going to make me face it."

Sekhmet narrowed her eyes as Emilia shook her head and puffed out her chest. The overwhelming pressure was threatening to consume her, but Emilia's spirit would not yield.

If she came close to losing heart, memories of her mother and father would support her. If she came close to giving up, she had someone who would encourage her to keep going.

Emilia: “We’ll sprint so fast we dodge the sad futures. But if that doesn’t work, we’ll ride our momentum to soar over them. If people fall in the jump, we’ll put in our all to pull them back up. And if we keep doing this, we’ll wipe away every single tear.”

Sekhmet: “You sure sound confident for someone so reckless, haa. If you merely talk about ideals and what’s convenient for you, you’ll break the instant you slip up, huu. Do you not think that’ll happen, haa?”

Emilia: “If I were alone, that might have happened.”

Emilia responded fearlessly to Sekhmet’s mocking words.

In a sense, Emilia’s stance was one that meant being reliant on others. But that was the most difficult option for Emilia, after never being able to choose a single thing for herself.

Sekhmet: “———”

Sekhmet looked utterly floored. She immediately looked down, the table and her hair concealing her expression. When——

Sekhmet: “Pfft, kaaha... haaaa, hahahaha! Ahh, yes! So that’s it! Yes, that’s it, that’s definitely it, of course you’d give that answer now! Ahhh, hilarious!”

Emilia: “Is it really that funny?”

Sekhmet: “It’s an absolute riot to me, haa. Okay, huu? So, Echidna, right, haa... she’s this terrible wacko even after her death, huu... She enjoys watching the Trial’s challengers agonize over their pasts and presents and futures alone, haa... The idea that her plans would be destroyed, and like this... Ahhhh, it’s hilarious, huu.”

Sekhmet laughed in an uproar, taking pained breaths while speaking cheerfully. She lifted her head and sat upright, leaning against the chair back to view Emilia straight-on.

Sekhmet’s eyes hosted a nostalgic gleam as she smiled,

Sekhmet: “The Trial presumes you’re taking it alone, haa... and you answer it by saying that you won’t face your challenges alone, huu— If Echidna heard this, she’d moan sour grapes all day, all while looking dead serious, haa.”

Emilia: “Oh. So that’s the reply I could have had... Mhm, I reeeally want to see that expression on her face too.”

Sekhmet: “She’s a terrible loser, so I doubt she’d let you see her looking like that, huu. That’s a privilege reserved for us dream-dwellers, haa.”

Emilia: “So unfair.”

Emilia pouted, which just made Sekhmet’s expression look more gleeful. To an outside observer, the harmonious joy emanating from them might make them look like friends who had known each other for decades.

Sekhmet: “Though, in exchange for that, I’ll bestow you with your Trial results, haa. As you’d expect, there’s nothing to complain about— in fact, you pass with a gold star, huu.”

Emilia: “Should it really be that simple?”

Sekhmet: “Did you want a more confusing answer, or some dramatic spiel, haa? Apologies, but you’d be wrong to expect something like that from me, huu. I’m the supervisor right now, and my word goes, huu. The Trial’s over without any issue, haa.”

With a deep breath, Sekhmet snapped her fingers. She failed to get a sound on the first attempt, or the second, but on the third try she finally managed a click— and a breeze gusted from behind Emilia.

Emilia glanced behind her, her silver hair swaying, to find that a door had appeared at the bottom of the hill. It did not look like it led anywhere, but Emilia intuitively knew that this door was the exit of this dream world.

Emilia: “You mean... once I go through that door, the Trial’s over?”

Sekhmet: “That’s the one, haa. Congratulations, huu. In the past four-hundred years, haa... since this Tomb was created and Echidna’s Trials came into operation, nobody had defeated these Trials, huu. Well, not that there was a lot of challengers in the first place, haa.”

Emilia: “Yeah. Not many people have been to Sanctuary, and meeting the requirement to get trapped in Sanctuary is actually surprisingly tough.”

Sekhmet: “There’s that too, but well, it doesn’t really matter, huu. It’s all over anyway, haa.”

It did bother Emilia how Sekhmet had started being vague, but she did not pry into it. More importantly, she was ecstatic to hear that the Trials were over.

Honestly, she did not feel any sense of achievement yet. It had not hit her yet. She had struggled so much with the First Trial to the point of almost broking down, thinking this whole thing impossible. She did feel that she had come here resolved not to lose, but even so—

Sekhmet: “You don’t look like you agree with it, huu.”

Emilia: “Erm, well I am kinda bothered. Reeally just kinda bothered.”

Sekhmet: “Echidna doesn’t present problems that can’t be solved, haa. It’s incorrect to say that’s the gist of it, but that’s basically the gist of it, huu.”

When it’s one Witch saying it about another, it was probably right.

Emilia nodded reluctantly in a show of agreement. Sekhmet glanced at her, examining her, before giving a small wave of her hand on the table.

Sekhmet: “Once you exit, haa... that door behind you, it’s goodbye to this dream castle, huu. Which also means that’s the end of the Trial, haa. And that you’re qualified to enter the room, huu... in the back of the Trial chamber, haa.”

Emilia: “Open, the door. Mhm, right. And what’s in there?”

Sekhmet: “The mechanism that keeps the Tomb functioning, huu. Once it’s stopped, haa... Sanctuary’s duties will come to their end, huu. You’ll know how to stop it once you go in, haa.”

Emilia: "I stop the Tomb's functions, and Sanctuary's duties end. And the barrier disappears."

If the barrier was extinguished, then Emilia and the people of Sanctuary would be able to exit the forest.

She did not know how many people would leave for the outside world once the barrier was opened. Or whether life on the outside would truly be to their benefit.

But they could not stay closed up in here any longer.

Just like how Subaru had argued Garfiel down, Emilia had to convince them. It was the end of a long period spent in a place whose time had been stopped.

Once time moved again, how were they going to make a place for themselves to live?

If possible, then Emilia wanted to search for the answer with them. She could guide them by the hand, give a push to their backs, and no matter how hard it became, she could walk by their side.

Though it was an unreliable, shaky, and fledgling demonstration of leadership.

Sekhmet: "That's enough."

Sekhmet spoke, as if she had seen into Emilia's thoughts.

That comment alone did not come with any of her characteristic sighs. Sekhmet had said that, directed at Emilia, while looking her straight-on, making Emilia gulp.

And smile.

Emilia: "Mhm, thank you. That's how I want to go my way."

With that, Emilia got to her feet.

She brushed her silver hair into order, before bowing her head to Sekhmet, who was seeing her off.

She did not really know why she was doing it. But it felt like simply saying a goodbye would not be enough. Why was it that she felt so grateful? Sekhmet surely would not tell her.

She pushed her seat in, and descended the hill on her way to the door.

The door looked ephemeral as it stood there in the middle of the meadow, and Emilia realized that she felt somewhat sad to be leaving the castle in a dream.

White table, crisp breeze. Bright sunshine, perfect weather. It would be so fun to hold a tea party around that table.

Emilia: "Sekhmet-san. Can you tell Echidna something for me?"

Sekhmet: "...Let's hear it, haa."

Emilia: "If we ever get the chance to see each other again, let's have a tea party. Even if it's just a dream, I'll definitely welcome it."

Sekhmet: "—No problem at all. I'll tell her."

Her hand on the doorknob, Emilia glanced back to address Sekhmet, who smiled. Emilia returned the smile, and opened the door.

Beyond the door was darkness.

But for some reason, she felt no hesitation about stepping into it. Emilia already knew exactly where it led.

She had overcome her past, chosen her present, and now met a door to the future.

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—Feeling somewhat suffocated, Emilia sat up on the hard ground. Coming back from the Trial was not the same as waking up from sleep.

It wasn't that her body had fallen into slumber, but that her consciousness had been taken from her body and led somewhere else. Her body and soul had been in different places, and seeing that her soul hadn't been sleeping, of course it would feel different from sleep.

If it were the same kind of thing as normal sleep, then considering that Emilia was rather bad at waking up, quite a lot of time would pass until she awakened in full. Before, Puck would be the one to wake her up. But as he was not present, it would have taken considerable time.

And now she would need to learn how to deal with this on her own, for the future.

Emilia: “—Ah, gotta stop.”

Emilia shook her head to dispel her sleepy thoughts, and put her hand to the wall as she got to her feet. She felt pretty much fine. It still did not feel like she had overcome the Trials.

But if what Sekhmet had told her in the dream was true—

Emilia: “I should be able to open the door.”

She looked to the back of the chamber, sighting the stone door across the small room.

The door had not moved an inch when she had pushed or pulled it before, and just like how the Tomb's walls glimmered slightly in Emilia's vision, this door also looked like it was cloaked in light.

It might mean that it was unlocked.

Emilia's footsteps pealed as she approached the door. As she stood before it, she held her breath for a moment.

On the other side of this door would be something that would liberate Sanctuary. Sekhmet had said Emilia would know what to do, but Emilia was frankly worried that she did not. Emilia was not exactly confident about her smarts.

Was she not allowed to bring anyone along with her? Though, considering the fact that not many people could get this far inside, she got a feeling that the door would not open if anyone else were around.

Perhaps it was happening because of how smoothly it had gone. Emilia could not erase her paranoia about that door. “Perhaps it was all a deception”, she wondered. You could call that being warier than before, but it was a kind of wariness exclusive to things connected to Echidna. A sense of caution she got because she knew the personality of the person who had set it up.

Emilia: “Anyway, have to go in. Okay, here I go.”

She balls her hands into fists to psych herself up, and moved to put her hand to the door. Should she push or pull? While she considered the issue, just as her fingertips grazed the door—

—The stone door slid sideways to make a path for Emilia.

Emilia: “...I feel like Echidna has a reeeally nasty smile right now.”

Emilia, pouting at her spoiled start, let that mutter escape her lips. She got the feeling that the door’s gimmick was some very elaborate pestering from Echidna, which slightly calmed her tension.

She sighed, gets herself back in the mood, and stepped into the room.

The door opened into a room less than half the size of the Trial chamber.

It was smaller than a room already small by itself. Just two beds from the Roswaal mansion would be enough to occupy that whole space. She had not expected the room to be this cramped. Her eyes widened at how constrained it was, before she spotted the thing in the back of the room... then putting her hand to her mouth in shock.

—In the back of the room was something like a transparent coffin, a woman lying inside. Her time was frozen, keeping her so beautiful that you would think she was only sleeping. The coffin looked to be fashioned from spellstone, and when Emilia touched it to examine its purity, she was shocked at its superior quality. Such high-grade crystal would excel even Puck’s old Anchor.

A woman, sealed in magic ore capable of sealing things superior to the Great Spirit Puck— Of course, she was not breathing. Emilia felt no life from her, and what remains was naught but a husk.

Her long, sleek hair was white as frost. Her cheeks and neck, and whatever areas of skin were visible, possessed the beauty of virgin snow. Emilia’s breathing almost stopped before her stunning visage. Her beautiful form was dressed in perfectly black garment, not a single superfluous color present, the dress-like clothing had been tailored for her, in miraculous harmony with her form.

A beautiful woman who could be described with only two hues— white and black.

True beauty, with its utter lack of need for any superfluous accessories, would probably feel terror when faced with this vision of black and white.

Emilia: “She’s beautiful...”

Emilia’s thoughts escaped her lips. She would find another strikingly beautiful woman if she looked in the mirror, but her sentiments had nothing to do with that. She was simply so enraptured by beauty of this thing before her to the point of being absolutely moved.

A beautiful woman of black and white.

That would be someone she had met in the castle of dreams, the Witch of Greed.

In the depths of the Tomb, waiting there, beyond the defeat of the Witch of Greed’s Trials was—

Emilia: “She looks like Echidna... but who is she?”

A woman reminiscent of the Thirst for Knowledge Incarnate, but who Emilia had never seen before.



Illustration from Volume 15, coloring by DdukaE ([source](#))

Arc 4 Chapter 127B - Never Quit

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 15, Chapter 4 “Next Time, I’m Sure We’ll Have Tea”, Part 4 (starting half-way), and Volume 15, Chapter 6 “It Started with Revenge”, Parts 4-5 & 7

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by SummaryAnon – [Complete](#), Page 283

The only observable thing in the room was the white woman in the coffin.

Emilia: “Then, this thing she’s entombed in... is the mechanism to turn off the barrier?”

Emilia tilted her head, looking perplexed, drawing that conclusion after looking over the room.

There were no nice and obvious levers, or spellstones to be crushed. A dim glow shrouded the transparent magic crystal encasing her, and Emilia could tell that it was siphoning Mana.

The only functioning thing in this place was this coffin.

Emilia: “Seriously, who is she... Perhaps Echidna’s mother?”

Emilia thought back on the Witch who had always looked so disgusted around Emilia. She had possessed white hair and worn black clothes, like the woman in the coffin, and Emilia remembered vividly how attractive her features were as well.

The visage of the Witch in her memories and of the woman in the coffin had many points in common. The positioning of her closed eyes, or the shape of the bridge from her lips to her nose were among those. Echidna had looked like she was in her late teens, while the woman in the coffin rather looked like she was in her early twenties. Perhaps it was better to think of her as Echidna’s older sister rather than her mother.

Emilia: “And... there’s no name engraved. But this is supposed to be Echidna’s Tomb.”

Emilia had entered, only to find that the woman in the coffin was not Echidna. Perhaps the Tomb's name was a deception, or—

Emilia: "Maybe this is Echidna, and the girl I saw in the dream wasn't Echidna?"

It was a crazy theory, and even Emilia had to shake her head.

Leaving aside whatever Echidna would say, Sekhmet would surely have mentioned something. And now it was too late for Emilia to simply regard anyone else as Echidna.

Emilia: "It's Echidna's Tomb, but someone else is sleeping here... That might be what's happening."

If so, then they should change the name of the Tomb, as it said, "Echidna rests here". But it was someone else's place of slumber, which caused lots of problems. Offerings would be going to the wrong person, among other things.

It was not the most clear-cut of conclusions, but it was what Emilia had reached it as she inspected the coffin, taking care not to touch the thing.

She glanced over the flow of Mana. It appeared that the coffin and the Tomb were absorbing minuscule amounts of Mana from the earth connected to the Tomb, using that Mana to power some kind of algorithm.

It was absorbing a minute load of Mana, but it was nonetheless powering as something as huge as the barrier, indicating that it was collecting the Mana in quite a large area.

"Earth connected to the Tomb" had been too literal a statement. The entire breadth of the forest inside the barrier was probably the Tomb's power source. And the Tomb was taking tiny loads of Mana at a time so that it would not affect that power source.

Emilia: "It's amazing... So amazing, that I have no idea what it's doing..."

The algorithm was capturing a flow of Mana, powering the magical faculties. Emilia could write simpler algorithms, but the complexity of the algorithm for the barrier around Sanctuary far exceeded her comprehension.

If she stopped these functions, she doubted they would ever restart. Not that there was any need to restart them.

Emilia: “There. If I cut off this flow, the supply will probably be severed.”

Emilia followed the flow of Mana, and locating the origin point for the barrier, which used the coffin as its nucleus.

Inside the Tomb, where the woman’s hands were folded atop her stomach— was the exact point into which the Mana flowed. If Emilia interfered with the Mana’s flow to disrupt the algorithm, then that would terminate all the Tomb’s faculties.

Emilia: “——”

For a moment, she hesitated.

Terminating the Tomb’s faculties would probably damage the mechanism that started the Trial. Which meant that she would no longer be able to enter that castle of dreams.

—She would probably never get to have that tea party with Echidna.

The Witches, or at least Sekhmet, knew about Emilia’s mother. She had felt both awe and nostalgia for Sekhmet’s overwhelming power. She wanted to know what exactly that sense of familiarity had meant.

If entering the castle of dreams were impossible, she would be furthering herself from that goal. And that—

Emilia: “—I just can’t let go, can I?”

With that mutter, Emilia disrupted the weak flow of Mana transmitting from the coffin, with her own Mana originating from her fingertips.

The power that supported Sanctuary’s faculties and comprised its barrier had been messed with. It meddled with the critical parts of the algorithm, compounding from a small into a massive alteration.

The glow eventually melted away, all signs of the algorithm vanishing from the spellstone coffin. All that remained after one last flash of light was the pure magic crystal, the woman still sealed inside.

Emilia: "...I guess that's the end."

Having observed no visible changes, Emilia timidly looked around the area. The flow of Mana previously circling through the Tomb was gone, leaving the Tomb as nothing more than a massive stone building.

With a quiet sigh, Emilia leaned against the coffin.

The Tomb had probably stopped rejecting the unqualified now. Emilia should bring Roswaal or Ryuzu inside, as they would probably know what was going on, and ask them who the person slumbering here was.

Emilia: "It's over... Yes, it's over..."

By repeating that statement over and over, Emilia attempted to reassure herself of the truth that did not feel true. She thought back on the lofty talk she had given to Roswaal before challenging the Tomb.

Roswaal had told her, "All you have to do is to reach the results you desire".

Emilia could not guess what his feelings had been at the time, but she doubted that he wanted her to beat the Trial. Though, he had also been the one who had brought her here and was endorsing her as a candidate for the Royal Selection, leaving her confused as to his reasoning.

Emilia: "Teacher... That was what he said, right?"

She also recalled this person who Roswaal had called Teacher. Even someone at the pinnacle of magic like Roswaal would, naturally, have had a master. Roswaal's master, that being this person called Teacher, had created the Sanctuary with him.

Emilia: "And maybe... that was you."

Thought Emilia as she stroked the coffin. If Roswaal had a teacher, someone irreplaceable to him, then perhaps this white woman would be suitable for that spot.

Emilia: "—I need to talk to everyone."

Emilia shook her head, pulling her gaze away from the coffin.

Though, she would have to postpone the talk about the entombed woman. According to Subaru, if they failed to exit Sanctuary before tomorrow night, that is, the dawn of the day after the next one, then something terrible was going to happen.

“If anything obviously out of the ordinary happens in Sanctuary, run away as fast as you can”, he had said.

Though she had a whole day of extra time, she did not know whether any unforeseen circumstances were going to pop up. She trotted out of the room and into the hallway, making her way to the exit. If things were still the same, then Ryuzu and the people of Sanctuary should be waiting for her outside.

Emilia’s footsteps rang over the stone as she ran down the corridor, before exiting the dark tomb to the open plaza. Where—

Emilia: “—Eh?”

—Met with a blizzard raging through Sanctuary, Emilia breathed a hazy, white breath.

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The snow encompassed everything in sight.

The gale roared close by, and the snow stole her body of warmth. After a white puff of breath, Emilia’s amethyst eyes blinked as her throat froze in shock.

—What happened!??

???: “—lia-sama!”

The wind howled. Her chilled ears throbbed in pain.

Frigid gusts felt like they sliced Emilia’s skin, dressed lightly as she was, when she heard a voice calling from beyond the blizzard, leading her to stop still.

Snow had already accumulated up to Emilia's knees, threatening to swamp her down. Every step she took was forceful, as she slogged through the frost to find silhouettes gathered beyond the veil of white. They must be the people of Sanctuary. Meaning that they had waited for Emilia in the blizzard, without ever retreating indoors---

Emilia: "Everyone! Why are you all outside in this sn... Huh?"

Emilia imagined that everyone would be huddled together to stave off the cold, when she stopped.

There were about forty Sanctuary dwellers including Ryuzu. That was a huge number to start with, but Emilia spotted people who should not be present as well.

???: "Emilia-sama! Is the Trial over!?"

The speaker was a young man with a crew cut.

Emilia knew him. Because she had spoken with him before coming to Sanctuary, and she would have spoken to him even if he did not acknowledge her.

It was a youth from Arlam Village's young men's brigade.

Seeing him, when he was supposed to have left Sanctuary several hours ago on Otto's instructions, made Emilia's eyes shoot open. And what surprised her even more was that it was not just him. With the man sporting a crewcut as their leader, Emilia spotted several other people from Arlam. They had come in carriages, huddling with the people of Sanctuary inside the vehicles or under their shadow to endure the blizzard.

Emilia: "Wh—why is everyone...? But didn't you evacuate?"

Man: "Yes, we did. On Subaru-sama and Otto-san's instructions. They said that the dragons knew the way, so we should just run."

Emilia: "Then why!? Did you not hear that it's going to be dangerous here?"

Man: "We did. And we were told."

The youth grit his teeth, before raising his head and pointing beyond the forest.

Man: “To wait outside the forest, to return once the signal appears from Sanctuary, and to retrieve those still here.”

Emilia: “Huh?”

Man: “Those remaining, such as Ram-sama and the others. Anyway, they would fire magic into the sky. We were to return to Sanctuary once we saw it, load the residents into carriages, and leave.”

Emilia: “Who gave these instructions!?”

Man: “Otto-san did.”

Hearing Otto’s name made Emilia think of that flaky-looking merchant.

Though, no matter what impression he gave, he was Subaru’s friend. Every time she saw the two talking jovially, it reaffirmed Emilia’s assessment that Otto was someone capable of rivalling Subaru. Otto had definitely planned a lot of the events in Sanctuary, starting with the Garfiel affair, while acting as Subaru’s co-conspirator.

Meaning that the instructions were of utmost significance.

Emilia: “B—but, this was still reckless. The blizzard is blowing so hard... You should have known that doing this was crazy!”

Man: “...”

Emilia: “What’s wrong?”

The man made an awkward-looking expression and averted his gaze. Emilia did not overlook his reaction, instead pressing him further. Emilia’s amethyst gaze pierced him. He put his hand to his brow, and exhaled a frigid-white sigh.

Man: “Otto-san told us that what would be truly dangerous would be snow arriving prior to the signal. Since snowfall marks the time limit... He told us to immediately leave the forest then.”

Emilia: “They even knew about the snowfall... No, just, never mind that. Why did you come, then!?”

Man: “—Because it snowed.”

The man straightened his back and gave his firm reply to Emilia’s wails. His gaze was so strong that it made Emilia fall speechless.

They had known that snowfall meant danger. And when they saw it was snowing in Sanctuary, they had understood they had reached the time limit for that danger. And despite that knowledge, they had chosen to come here.

They had rushed here, where the residents of Sanctuary were in danger.

Man: “We suspected that Subaru-sama or yourself would have done exactly this.”

Emilia: “———”

With a wry smile, the man answered the question in Emilia’s throat.

So the evacuees overlooking the carriages behind him were Arlam’s young men brigade. Since their goal was to evacuate the people of Sanctuary, everyone unneeded must have left them and evacuated by themselves. That said, those who had left would be forced into the pain of evacuating by foot. And these men were here, because they had judged that it was the correct thing to do.

Man: “Emilia-sama, if the Trial is over... Can they exit this place?”

Emilia: “Y—yes, they can. But, with this snow and wind...”

The man gazed at the ground, clicking his tongue in frustration. Snow had piled so thick that walking even a short distance was a trial in itself. Carriage wheels would not move in these conditions; they were stranded.

But if they could at least find somewhere warm, where many people could wait through the cold—

Emilia: “If we cannot relocate as far as the cathedral... let’s get everyone inside the Tomb. The Mana there keeps the inside warm, and we don’t have to worry about the building collapsing beneath the snow.”

Man: “Is it possible to go in?”

Emilia: "I turned off the Tomb's dangerous mechanisms, everything's dandy now. Anyway, are you able to transport everyone as far as the Tomb? And the dragons should be loosed from the carriages and let inside too."

The six dragons had accommodated the brigade and brought them all the way back here. Even in this instant, the dragons' carriages were protecting two-digit columns' worth of people. It was inconceivable that they could possibly abandon the dragons.

The man nodded with a "definitely".

It should be good enough to deal with the snow for the moment. The issue now was that something dangerous was going to happen alongside the snowfall.

Emilia: "I wish we'd actually talked about this beforehand!"

Emilia mourned the lack of time to speak with Subaru before challenging the Trials. This had probably happened because Subaru had not wanted to leave Emilia with anything that would worry her needlessly. Though she was glad for his thoughtfulness, it was ridiculous that it was going to hamper her reaction to the danger.

Emilia could think of three people who, like Subaru's group, probably would know about the snow. That would be Roswaal, Ram, and—

???: "Ya've done well to make it back to us, Emilia-sama."

Emilia: "Ryuzu-san!"

A pink-haired girl hopped out of a carriage and onto the snow— Ryuzu. With how short she was, the snow that reached up to Emilia's knees reached up to her thighs. She trekked laboriously through the snow while Emilia hurriedly approached her.

Emilia: "The Trial's all over now! Is everybody here!?"

Ryuzu: "All of Sanctuary's people, 'n all of the humans who came back for us are present, yes. But..."

Emilia: "But?"

Ryuzu: “That child, Ram, and Ros-bo ain’t here. The two of’em have been somewhere else since before it started snowing.”

Emilia gazed over the people and the carriages. She did not spot that familiarly bizarre outfit, nor that dependable pink-haired girl.

Emilia: “If I don’t search for them... Ryuzu-san! Do you know? What’s going to happen if we stay in Sanctuary with all this snow?”

Ryuzu: “———”

Ryuzu’s cheeks stiffened and she lowered her gaze. Emilia recognized what it meant. Ryuzu knew what was happening. She knew what the danger was.

Emilia: “Please tell me, Ryuzu-san. We have to prevent it.”

Ryuzu: “But ya see, the timing for it’s off. Su-bo said that Ros-bo’s planning for snow to fall tomorrow night, so there must’ve been some mistake for it to be snowing now...”

Emilia: “What mistake, it is snowing right now! So! We need to do whatever we need to do when the snow comes! Ryuzu-san!”

Emilia put her hands on Ryuzu’s small shoulders as she attempted to persuade her. Ryuzu’s sour expression shifted, until she was left staring at Emilia in dumb shock.

Emilia: “Wh—what’s wrong, Ryuzu-san?”

Ryuzu: “...Emilia-sama. Have ya gone into the building deep in Sanctuary’s forest?”

Emilia: “Deep in the forest? No, I haven’t...”

Emilia tilted her head in confusion.

“That should not be possi...”, begun Ryuzu, before looking at the Tomb behind Emilia.

Ryuzu: “Then maybe there was something in the Tomb... that seem’d special, perhaps? Like, perhaps a giant spellstone, or something similar.”

Emilia: “—There was. A reeeally big spellstone. I kinda wanted to ask you and Roswaal to look at it later.”

Emilia glanced around the area, then drew her lips near to Ryuzu’s ear. So that nobody else could hear her, as they begun preparations to move the dragons.

Emilia: “There was a woman inside the magic crystal. I don’t know who she is.”

Ryuzu: “———!”

The information rocked Ryuzu’s expression. Ryuzu’s eyes shot open as she stared at Emilia. After a long, long sigh, she let out a “Then” as she nodded, looking as if convinced by something.

Ryuzu: “Understood. Emilia-sama, ask whatever ya wish. I’m obligated to answer you. Obligated to follow yer orders.”

Emilia: “I’m not ordering anything!”

Ryuzu: “Listen. That thing ya touched in the Tomb’s a spellstone that picks who’s qualified to command Ryuzu. Ya now hold those qualifications instead of Gar-bo. I... No, we, shall obey ya. Please order us however ya wish.”

With that solemn reply, Ryuzu attempted to lower herself while already thigh-deep in snow. This would result in her kneeling and burying herself head-deep in snow, causing Emilia to panic. She promptly grabbed Ryuzu by the shoulders to stop her.

Emilia: “Uwa! Right, okay! So I can ask things from you, Ryuzu-san. Then I’ll ask this. Please tell me what happens when there’s snow in Sanctuary.”

Ryuzu: “...Su-bo says that once it snows in Sanctuary, the Witchbeast, the Great Rabbit’ll come. It’s drawn here by the Mana in the spell that changes the weather to snowfall... ‘Twas the word.”

Emilia: “Spell to change the weather... Then, somebody’s behind this!?”

Surprised, Ryuzu silently nodded to Emilia.

This was magic immense enough to manipulate the weather. Puck could easily do this, if he were serious. Which made Puck the most suspicious candidate, but considering Ryuzu's attitude and the context of the situation, Emilia immediately landed on the culprit.

Emilia: "...Is it Roswaal?"

Ryuzu: "Most likely. I think Miss Ram's left to try and stop him. But if the snow came anyway, then it's possible that..."

Emilia: "Stop. I don't want to think about it. Anyway, I need to find them. Ryuzu-san, I'm going to start searching the village for them. If you have any ideas where they could—"

Ryuzu: "No need for that, Emilia-sama."

She interrupted Emilia with incredible confidence. It was like she knew exactly what Emilia was thinking, and it made Emilia gulp. And—

Ryuzu: "Us Ryuzus keep a close eye on everything Sanctuary— We'll find and get ya to them in a jiffy."

Ryuzu gave Emilia her stamp of approval.

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Ram, as she laid unconscious, almost looked as if she was merely sleeping.

Roswaal: "...Ram?"

Roswaal drew the fallen, limp girl into his arms, jerking her. But Ram gave no reply. This girl, who would put aside anything to prioritize Roswaal's words. Ram.

Of course she did not reply.

Ram was dying this very instant. And it was all because of Roswaal.

The burning of the Gospel had sent him into a fury. His vision seething with crimson, he had no idea what was anything anymore, but he knew that he could not forgive Ram for doing this and—

Roswaal: “———”

—He had struck her with a ball of fire while she was undefended, blasting her away.

She had strained herself with imperfect oni strength, and burdened herself with the exact same fatigue only hours earlier. Ram’s body had reached its limit when a fireball blasted her.

Her life hanged in the balance.

Roswaal: “...Ram.”

Roswaal could not remember what he had thought as he drew near to her prone form and touched her. Even now, as he held her close and gaze at her sleeping, he did not think anything.

Roswaal regarded Ram as an incredibly convenient pawn. She had gone through ordeals by his hand, and their Contract preserved an extremely simple relationship between them. He had exposed his true thoughts only to Ram, and had spoken of his goal only to Ram. He believed that once that goal had been achieved, he would hand himself over to her as a reward for his accomplice.

But Ram had betrayed Roswaal partway through his course.

Ram’s statements had been correct; according to her Contract, the situation had not unfolded as Roswaal intended, and her rebellion was her pre-established revenge.

So he would not fault Ram. Were he to be forced to say anything, then he would have liked her to postpone her revenge and exact it once the situation with the barrier had been resolved without a doubt. There was also the topic of his bet with Subaru. Garfiel had been unexpectedly flexible, and some sympathetic-sounding talk had made Emilia reattempt the Trial, but ultimately Subaru’s speeches had been the ramblings of a weakling.

It was impossible to defy a predetermined future. The path to reach that future may change, but events would still lead to the destined end. Should someone stray from the path leading to the correct ending, what awaited was doom.

But they were nonetheless resisting it, and it made Roswaal laugh. And the fact that Roswaal knew this, and knew how weak he was for fearing their actions, also brought about laughter.

Why were they trying to change anything? He could not understand it.

Once any feeling reached its peak, once it reached its apex, it would never fade in intensity. If you loved someone, if your heart ever blazed with love for someone, then that heat, that brilliance, ought to be eternal.

And the same concept applied even if the emotion in question were hatred.

Feelings held for a long, long time should be sublimated into legitimacy. Feelings fostered over time were ironclad, never to yield to anyone. They absolutely must be.

Garfiel's hatred for the outside had been broken.

Emilia had accepted her detested and sorrowful past.

And Ram's endless, vengeful hatred for Roswaal had,

Ram: "I am in love with you, Roswaal-sama."

Roswaal: "———!!"

A love confession like a curse, burning deep in his ears.

Words that had come from the mouth of the girl in his arms, which absolutely should never have.

Had the Contract been binding her heart or soul, then he would have understood it. Her burning desire for revenge had been converted into subordination to Roswaal, and her hatred into affection. That was why Roswaal had Ram assist him in his goal more than anyone else, and trusted her for what would come after its realization more than anyone else.

Because Roswaal believed in her hatred that had turned to love, and in her vengeful desire to kill him. Because he believed in the hatred found in the eyes of the girl when he had first met her, and how she had gazed at him, murder in her eyes.

—And yet Ram had betrayed her own vengeance, to sing her love.

Roswaal: "Why did you, Ram...? I don't understand it..."

Roswaal heard how her faint breathing grew distant, and sensed that Ram's life was ending.

Her heartbeat faded. Something screamed that it must not continue. His right eye ached. Ached, so terribly. Stop! Stop asserting yourself. He was going to lose himself.

What should he do? What must he do? He could not tell what he needed to do, and what he must not do. He could not remember it. He could not conceive it.

He looked around the area. Nothing here was something he sought. The Gospel, which told Roswaal of the correct path, had been lost in flames. Nobody would teach Roswaal. What was the choice he must make here? Nobody would teach him. It could not be helped anymore.

Roswaal: “—Wailing wind beckons the snow, the light that fills the earth returns to sky. Each droplet is silence given form, ivory untouched by past karma's favor laments unchanging eternity.”

A canto.

This hummed, song-like canto directed to the power wrapped around Roswaal L. Mathers. The vast store of Mana interacted with the refined algorithm, bringing dark clouds to the night forest. Frozen wind blew, and a chill cold enough to freeze one to the core raged through Sanctuary. Clouds burdened with snow shrouded the entirety of the enclosed forest, and white snowflakes fell to the earth one after the other.

—This was the power of the massive-scale magic algorithm, Ultimillion.

Roswaal: “—Ugh, kh.”

After the canto, the magical power held for extensive time was released. A massive load of Mana was ripped out of Roswaal, and even he, boasting a transcendental store of Mana, had to feel somewhat dizzy.

Originally, the Mana for magic this widespread would be built up over several months, and it should be used on a smaller area. Roswaal was irregular for preparing the necessary Mana in only two days, and for affecting a range more than twice the normal range.

After the magician who achieved this feat gave a long sigh, he found himself utterly lost on what to do.

Roswaal: “I’ve made it snow, as according to the Gospel... What do I do now?”

Roswaal had forgotten that he had made it snow one day earlier than what the Gospel’s writ had stated. Or actually, not even the bet occupied a corner of his mind anymore.

Roswaal did not pay any heed to the method. His only concerns were how the events around Sanctuary would conclude. Snow would fall, and the barrier would be undone. Should that happen, should that happen— Then what happens?

Roswaal: “Ram... Yes... Ram.”

He could no longer hear Ram’s breathing.

Roswaal looked down at her face, and gently touched her forehead. Her transformation meant that her scar, where her horn used to be, was bleeding. Roswaal wiped away the blood, and as he always did with Ram, and injected colorless Mana, formed from a combination of all six Mana elements, into her. This had been a ritual continuously performed by the pair, so that Ram’s oni blood would not conquer her.

It was not as if he was thinking anything in particular.

Roswaal unconsciously understood that he was merely betting that her vitality as an oni would keep her alive. He had no questions about saving her. Ram needed to live. For the sake of Roswaal’s goal, and for what would come after that goal had been fulfilled.

Roswaal: “Teacher... Teacher, I... What am I supposed to do! Teacher... Teacher! Please tell me... please... guide me, again...”

Roswaal’s confusion reached its pinnacle, and he could not even comprehend his own heart as he wailed. Though he was trying to ensure Ram’s survival, his anger about her betrayal remained. He knew that he had lost his beacon, but still yearned for that old light.

The snow fell, encasing Roswaal and Ram in white flakes. Everything drowned in white, disappearing.

For some reason, the thought that it would be fine for that to happen, was not present in him in the slightest.

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Emilia cut through the snow, breathing white puffs as she dashed onward.

Emilia: “Huma! Again, Huma!”

She shouted, casting ice magic on top of ice magic. She was doing it to avoid losing any time from getting her feet bogged in the snow. She used her magic to purposefully harden the snow, giving her a path to sprint upon.

Some people would slip on it, and find themselves in quite a bit of danger by using this method, but,

Emilia: “Alright! Got it!”

Emilia was a practitioner of ice magic, and had grown up in Elio Forest. She was accustomed to frozen ground. She dashed over the freezing snow of Sanctuary like she owned the place, with her tiny escort running after her.

Emilia: “Is this honestly ok with you?”

Emilia asked her guide, who was out of breath. The girl looked up at Emilia, and replied with only a nod. They could communicate, but she wouldn’t talk to Emilia. This was exactly what Ryuzu— what the representative Ryuzu personality, had told her to expect.

Ryuzu had suddenly begun showing special respect to Emilia outside the Tomb.

She had informed Emilia that she was an entity born from the soul of a girl named Ryuzu Meyer, and that there were several duplicates of her in the same circumstances. These Ryuzus functioned as eyes, spotted around Sanctuary, had gone searching for Roswaal and Ram in the village, and were now guiding her to them.

In this world, there was a kind of extraordinarily rare magic, called duplication magic.

Emilia had never heard about it having been utilized on living creatures before, but perhaps it had been done as a kind of forbidden magic. Emilia had kept herself from asking all the questions she wanted to ask, instead running through Sanctuary while relying on the Ryuzu clone, in search of Roswaal and Ram.

Emilia: “If I don’t hurry... the Great Rabbit will show up!”

The Witchbeast Great Rabbit.

Even Emilia, ignorant of the world as she was, knew the name of this creature.

It was one of the Three Great Witchbeasts, alongside the White Whale and Black Serpent, and much like those other two beasts, it was regarded as a calamity.

It was a Witchbeast of weak, frail, tiny little rabbits. But the beast itself was a group of individuals, a horde of creatures. It was not each individual hare, but the entire group of them that made up the calamity called the Great Rabbit.

With its endless hunger and overwhelming numbers, it devoured everything in its path. But still that would not sate it, and it would proceed to wander the world while cannibalizing itself. Indeed, ‘twas a calamity.

The terrifying thing was how it could multiply itself infinitely. The Great Rabbit would usually be low in number, cannibalizing itself to stave hunger when nothing to eat was found— but should it lay eyes on prey that fueled its appetite, it could not be stopped. It would compound endlessly in number, gnashing away until the prey was destroyed, then cut its numbers back down as it moved on, leaving behind a wasteland. That was the nature of this thing.

Emilia had decided that she had no choice but to face this incredible Witchbeast. They had already lost the time they needed to flee the Rabbit’s attack. The accumulated snow was an obstacle to their escape, leaving Emilia and the others without options.

The non-combatants would hide in the Tomb, while a frontline would formed at the entrance.

That was the only strategy possible in opposing the Witchbeast. It would consist of Emilia and Roswaal. If possible, they would include Ram, as they needed to assemble all the combat power available in Sanctuary. And so—

Emilia: “———”

Snapped tree trunks and buildings battered from battle. Gashes in the earth, and unnatural pilings of snow— A man and a woman, close together in a tree's shade.

Having found Ram limp and sleeping, and the dazed Roswaal, Emilia shouted.

Emilia: “—Roswaal! Ram!!”

Emilia left the silent Ryuzu replicant behind as she glided over the frozen snow. She manipulated the ground beneath her however she wanted, scattering flakes of ice as she moved like a snow fairy, before grabbing Roswaal's shoulders, as he laid motionless, half-buried in the snow.

Emilia: “Are you listening!? Roswaal, come on, Roswaal! We're in trouble! We have to help everyone! This is not the time to be frozen!”

Roswaal: “———”

Rocking him made the snow fall off Roswaal's head. It revealed his expression, and Emilia clicked her throat. Roswaal's face, as he looked at Ram, eyes dim, looked feeble.

Emilia: “Roswaal...?”

Roswaal: “...”

Roswaal said nothing. It didn't even seem like he had noticed Emilia.

His lack of reaction scared her, and she lowered her gaze to what was cradled in his arms. There slept a pink-haired girl.

—With snow on her cheeks, showing no signs of melting.

Emilia: “—! Ram? Ram!”

Emilia called to Ram in Roswaal's arms, and tried to wake her up.

But Ram gave no particular reaction. Of course she did not reply, but she had not opened her eyes either— In fact, her eyelids did not even twitch. Emilia touched her cheek, and her lips, to find them abnormally cold. As if she was—

Emilia: “That, isn’t happening!”

Emilia rejected her ineffectual thinking as she gritted her teeth and reached into Ram’s clothes. Her hand brushed across Ram’s chest, where she found a faint heartbeat.

It could disappear at any moment, with how frail, and feeble it was.

Emilia: “—She’s alive! It’s okay! We still have time, Roswaal!”

With renewed hope, Emilia yelled as she glanced back to Roswaal. But Roswaal remained with his hand on Ram’s brow, looking utterly dazed.

And only then Emilia noticed.

There was a massive amount of Mana flowing from Roswaal’s hand and into Ram. And it was acting as Ram’s lifeline.

Emilia: “Then, you’re saving Ram’s life...”

Roswaal: “———”

Emilia: “—!”

As she realized that fact, Emilia also realized the bitter truth.

Ram was unconscious, in dire condition, and Roswaal must administer the delicate treatment to heal her. They could not participate in the fight.

Meaning that Emilia had to face the Great Rabbit on her own.

—Can she do it?

This monster was one of the three that had survived for four-hundred years, since the Witch of Envy’s era.

Who could guess how many people had steeled themselves to face this thing, just as Emilia was doing right now? None of them had managed to destroy the beast. How could Emilia stand up and fight it alone? Without Puck. Only Emilia.

Emilia: "If we go now..."

Maybe they could still run? But what were they meant to do if it chased them?

Were they to encounter it without any place to call a refuge or hiding place, then Emilia would not be able to protect the civilians from the Witchbeast. Defending some place like the Tomb presented the most potential.

It hurt that Roswaal and Ram could not help in combat, but Emilia must not abandon the fight.

Emilia: "Roswaal. Bring Ram and come along with me. Everybody from Sanctuary... Mhm, everybody is taking shelter in the Tomb. And I'm going to protect them. Don't give up on healing Ram, and—"

Roswaal: "It's useless."

Emilia met Roswaal's eye level and began proclaiming her resolve to Roswaal, when his whisper interrupted her. Roswaal stared at Ram's face, his eyes still hollow.

Roswaal: "Useless. Everything is... I don't know the future. I don't understand myself. This world is done."

Emilia: "So you're back to saying this...! Who cares about the book! Maybe someone kind of important wrote it, but how does that have any say in what we do!"

Unable to bear his resignation, Emilia raised her voice at Roswaal. Why was this happening? This was not the Roswaal that Emilia knew. Always composed, making bold decisions like nothing, acting like he knew absolutely everything there was to know, all with a grin. Was that not Roswaal?

Who was this weak man, who had given up on everything, looking like a cornered and lost child?

Emilia: "Roswaal. I can't understand what you're feeling or how hurt you are right now. I do want to understand, but there's no time for me to learn... But I want to make that time. And so. I need you to cooperate with me."

Roswaal: "———"

Emilia did not understand Roswaal. He could continue being like this, and she still would not understand him.

But if they exchanged words, and divulged their feelings, then she would understand some things. She would never understand if she never did that. Those things would never be communicated, if the time for them was never given.

Emilia needed to create the time they needed to grow closer to one another.

Emilia: “Please, stand up, Roswaal. Neither of us are ending here. We won’t let Ram end either. We’re all going back to everyone, together, and—”

Roswaal: “I...”

Emilia insisted. But Roswaal did not meet her gaze.

He continued staring down at Ram, his scarlet lips moving to say—

Roswaal: “I, quit...”

Spoken so quietly it could disappear.

The frigid, whistling winds continued whipping by, so the words were barely audible. The whisper had hardly left his lips. It was questionable whether Roswaal himself had heard it either.

But she had definitely heard that quiet sound of surrender. And so, Emilia—

Emilia: “—Don’t you dare say that!!”

—Grabbed Roswaal by the collar, screaming in anger.

The movement rocked Roswaal’s head, and he whimpered in pain. Emilia assaulted him, unrelenting, with her words.

Emilia: “You quit!? What are you saying, you quit!? There is nothing out there to possibly quit! There is nothing for you to quit! Don’t you dare give up! Don’t you dare surrender! Not me, or Ram, or you, are done with any single thing yet!”

Roswaal: “———”

Emilia: “I finished the Trial! The past I was so scared of! A happy present that could’ve happened! Sad futures that might come! I saw them all! And I still decided to walk this path... and with that resolve, I can finally walk it!”

She howled. Wrath beyond what Emilia could ever remember surged up inside her.

—Yes. There it is. Listen to that whiny voice, hear those pathetic opinions, see that gutless spirit. This is what it looks like when you accept surrender as your end.

Emilia’s roars made Roswaal’s cheeks stiffen, and he averted his gaze. This was not him being worried for Ram, this was him distracting himself and running from something he did not want to see. Emilia grabbed him by the jaw, forcing him to face her.

Emilia: “Look at people’s faces when they are talking to you!”

Roswaal: “—Hk.”

Emilia: “You won’t understand what people are thinking if you don’t look them in the eye. You won’t understand why people are doing what they’re doing if you don’t look them in the eye. Keep your eyes on mine, hear my voice, stand up, and follow me.”

Roswaal’s odd-colored eyes blinked as if realizing something. His lips twitched. But he did not manage to squeeze out any words.

Roswaal: “—Ah.”

Emilia: “I will never let anyone say that they quit. As long as you’re alive, there’s nothing out there for you to quit. So— I am not letting anyone die here!”

Emilia got to her feet and turned around.

Over ten Ryuzu doubles had assembled at this place. All of them kneeled reverently, awaiting orders. Emilia took a breath, and shouted her command.

Emilia: “Take Roswaal and Ram back to the Tomb. I’m protecting everyone, no matter what.”

Speaking grandly, and aware that she had only acquired this right by coincidence, Emilia led the obedient Ryuzus as she broke into a sprint through Sanctuary's snow. The Ryuzus grouped together to support Roswaal and Ram, taking turns to make the path while following after Emilia.

—Emilia was no longer hesitating in her course for an instant.

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And so the tales—

Subaru: “No need to push yourself so hard, Emilia-tan.”

The boy who cherished the girl, who had decided to protect everything, had returned to her side.

???: “You can hold off and fall back— The inaugural battle of deliverance is here.”

Emilia: “I’m sorry. That kind of went over my head.”

Their usual banter made her smile as she supported her failing body, her eyes tracking the white silhouettes as they pressed forward.

Two silhouettes, walking hand-in-hand. She heard two voices as well. They sounded lively, and feeling that she had been waiting to hear this, the girl's heartbeat pounded.

???: “What comes next is a complete unknown, in fact.”

???: “Yeah, we’ll be doing something about this— Together, me and you!!”

And the tales converged, their wishes perfect mirrors of one another, as they entered the finale.

Knight and Princess, facing Witchbeast in a blizzard-swept Sanctuary.

A Knight who could not manage on his own brought a magician at his side, consecrating everything to victory.

—The final battle of Sanctuary commenced.

Arc 4 Chapter 130 - Faces in the Snow

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 15, Chapter 8 “Faces Fashioned from Snow”

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by SummaryAnon — [Complete](#), Page 300

Icy winds whipped past. Frigid temperatures sliced at his skin. A horde of white hunger swamped everything in sight. The hand he was holding was warm. Natsuki Subaru felt not a speck of hesitation or doubt about standing here.

Subaru: “It’s cool that we had that cool entrance and all, but isn’t this a little weird!?”

Subaru raised his voice, addressing the unanticipated scene as the snow battered his cheeks.

Roaring wind raged through Sanctuary, which was currently embroiled in thick snow. Subaru had been ready for this to happen eventually, but the date was different from what he remembered.

Sanctuary would be buried in snow and lure the mob of white Witchbeasts at dawn— Supposedly, there should be over half a day of time left to spare.

Behind Subaru stood a silver-haired girl, breathing white with her shoulders heaving.

Emilia was unable to fully restrain the Mana overflowing from her body, and had half-encased herself in ice. Her left side was covered in white, and though that had to hurt, not a speck of anguish showed on her face.

Subaru mentally praised the bold Emilia, while simultaneously suspecting her as the cause of the snow. Had she been unable to control this frenzy of magic, bringing snow, and beckoning the Rabbit?

Subaru: “But then the order’s off...”

The sequence between the uncontrolled magic and the Rabbit’s arrival were backwards.

Emilia had used her magic to oppose the Rabbit, which resulted in her suffering damage. If Subaru was following the correct course of things, then the real cause was—

Subaru: “———”

Behind Emilia, Echidna’s Tomb loomed.

Subaru acknowledged the gazes peering at him out from the entrance, and nodded. If the people inside were the residents of Sanctuary, then they were not feeling the effects of the Tomb’s mechanisms.

That meant that the Tomb’s operations had been terminated, or rather, Emilia had defeated the Trial.

Emilia had overcome the Trial. Snow was falling earlier than anticipated. The state of Sanctuary’s citizens, and Emilia’s resolute shouts and expression. And also,

Subaru: “Roswaal.”

Roswaal: “———”

Roswaal, dazedly staring at Subaru while sitting beside the Tomb’s entrance. Subaru did not have the time right now to check if Ram, sleeping in his arms, was okay.

All he could do was to believe she was safe.

Beatrice: “Subaru.”

When the small hand gripping Subaru’s own gave him a tug.

Hit with an unfamiliar form of address from a familiar voice, Subaru choked.

Subaru: “Oughbuhnuh.”

Beatrice: “...Explain that bizarre reply, I suppose.”

Subaru: “It just feels so fresh when you say my name, so. Can you do it again but sounding shy?”

Beatrice: “What!? You are actually mad, in fact! This is no time for buffoonery, I suppose!”

Beatrice snapped at Subaru's silly request, her expression terrifying.

Subaru reluctantly dropped the issue, expecting her to ignore it no matter how much he pestered her, when—

Beatrice: "S—Subaru... There, I did it, in fact."

Subaru: "Beako, you are adorable."

Beatrice: "—! I'm never saying it again, I suppose! I'll remember this after we're done, in fact!"

Beatrice yelled in response, her face red as she swung her held hand in a huff.

Subaru looked at her, enchanted, while also directing his attention to the horde of approaching rabbits. He licks his dry lips.

Subaru: "So, Beatrice. We're fighting the Great Rabbit, how's your mental prep?"

Beatrice: "I am moments post-Contract. The opponent is one of the Three Great Witchbeasts. We are unprepared and conditions are poor. My Contractor is a novice. I have not participated in battle in four-hundred years."

Subaru: "And?"

Beatrice: "I could ask for no finer handicap, I suppose."

Beatrice smiled fearlessly as the beasts, their teeth chattering, swooped in to close the distance. Subaru stepped forward to face their attack, glancing to Emilia behind him.

Subaru: "Me and Beatrice are about to crush the Great Rabbit. Emilia-tan, I'm sorry for this, but some are gonna slip past, so I want you protecting everyone!"

Emilia: "I'm..."

Emilia cut off her sentence, hesitant for a moment. But after closing her eyes and taking a quiet breath,

Emilia: "Right. Leave it to me— And I'm leaving it to you."

Subaru: “Yup, all mine.”

Put the right people in the right places, split the roles up between them, and do what would be most fitting for you. Emilia inhaled deeply as she concentrated on controlling her magic and erected a defensive line. The snowfall continued to rage as Emilia formed a blockade of ice.

Subaru stepped out from Emilia’s line of defense as he gazed at the white typhoon.

Red eyes and sharp fangs stretched on as far as his eyes could see. Coated in pure white fur, this was the Witchbeast driven by the most primitive and insatiable hunger in the world. The Great Horde—otherwise said, the Great Rabbit.

The chittering of their fangs made the ache in Subaru’s soul spread to his whole body.

He had died gruesomely, flesh devoured, and innards ravaged, to those fangs. He had felt the agony of a hole gaping through his abdomen, spouting blood while teeth severed his windpipe. And he knew the overwhelming feeling of loss from death, his body chewed up and missing limbs, in Emilia’s arms.

To complete this loop series, Natsuki Subaru must overcome this Witchbeast.

Beatrice: “—Are you afraid, I suppose?”

Beatrice called out to Subaru, holding his breath as he gazed at the beast.

Her face was impassive as she glanced up at him. But her eyes, and her expression, informed Subaru far more eloquently than her words.

—Informed him exactly who was it that stood beside him.

Subaru: “Nope. Not at all.”

Beatrice: “Oh?”

Subaru: “Emilia’s at my back and you’re at my side. It’s like I’m strongest man in the world.”

Beatrice: “Doubtlessly, in fact.”

Beatrice's cheeks relaxed into a smile. Her expression was satisfied at his acknowledgement. Subaru joined her in her wicked smile.

The Great Rabbit entered a frenzy, rushing for the brazen duo.

Beatrice pointed her free right hand, the one not holding Subaru's, at the Rabbit.

Beatrice: "We'll begin with a warm-up, I suppose— El Minya."

Space spiraled alongside the canto as purple crystals materialized around Subaru and Beatrice, surrounding them.

Those things, with the brilliance and bearing of icicles, were the magical stakes that Beatrice had used in a previous loop to skewer Elsa. In a single instant, forty of them had formed.

It took less than a moment for one to aim and silently shoot off— without its aim deviating in the least, spearing straight through the open mouth of a rabbit. The skewer proceeded to plummet through the air and plunge into the rear lines of the horde, where it exploded. Fragments of crystal shredded the beasts around the site of impact, mincing them to pieces.

That was what one shot was capable of doing, and Beatrice had fired forty at once.

The looming omnipresent destruction caused bloody flowers to blossom through the white world. The ruthless opening attack had annihilated hundreds of hares. Aftermath of the destruction littered the clearing, where the surviving hares shrieked in agony. The beast could multiply infinitely and there were still individuals left, but even so, it worked Subaru up.

That was Beatrice's unimaginably devastating destructive capabilities do.

Subaru: "W-woaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!!"

Beatrice: "I—is it that incredible, I suppose? It isn't anything so impressive, in fact. This is the lowest of techniques from Betty, I suppose. A piece of cake, in fact."

Subaru: "No, what, the... This savage magic! What affinity—!?"

Beatrice: "It's obviously going to be Yin, I suppose. I'm not the best at other types of magic, in fact."

Said Beatrice, not looking entirely satisfied about Subaru's praise.

The ravaged Witchbeast immediately started cannibalizing the gore from the corpses, multiplying itself again, but Beatrice paid it not the slightest of mind.

Beatrice: "Pay attention in fact, Subaru. Here's a lecture from one Yin user to another, I suppose."

Subaru: "What, is that all?"

Beatrice: "Huh?"

Subaru: "Was our relationship just about both being Yin..."

Beatrice: "Th—that wasn't what I meant, in fact. You're a fellow Yin user, my Contractor, and also, hmm... Betty's Subaru, I suppose. Yes. And so here's my lesson to you, in fact."

Beatrice, flustered, probably did not even know what she was saying. She coughed before raising her finger and lowering her voice.

Beatrice: "About the apex of Yin— The most powerful magic within the realm of Yin."

Subaru: "What do I need to do?"

Beatrice: "Hold my hand, and keep me from being alone, I suppose."

Subaru: "I mean I do think that's important, but..."

Beatrice: "...It seems you do not quite understand Spiritualism, which gives me some concerns for the future, in fact."

She could be as exasperated as she wanted, as it would not change that he did not know what he did not know.

Beatrice shook her head at Subaru as he frowned, and pulled him forward by the hand.

Beatrice: "Fundamentally, a Spiritual Arts User and a Spirit fight on the battlefield as single entity with separate minds, I suppose."



Subaru: “A single entity with separate minds...”

Subaru recalled Emilia’s fighting style.

The most striking battle that had involved both Emilia and Puck had been the one with Elsa in the loot house. Emilia had placed Puck on offense while she took charge of defense. She would also use simpler techniques to buy time so that Puck could unleash massive attacks.

That bald old man had mentioned that that was the basis of how Spiritual Arts Users fight.

Subaru: “So I just have to do that. Okay, time for Shamac!”

Beatrice: “Being subject to your defective Shamac would probably damage us as well so I would rather not, in fact. And Subaru, your Gate is...”

Beatrice trailed off, looking reluctant to speak. Subaru felt apologetic that he had forced her into giving this consideration. His Gate was probably junk.

He had pushed it too far. He could feel that it was broken. Again, he was fantasizing.

Beatrice: “—It’s coming, I suppose.”

Muttered Beatrice halfway through her speech. The instant after Subaru let out an “Hmm?” in confusion, he realized that his feet were no longer touching the ground.

Beatrice kicked off the ground, and the jump carried the two of them straight into the air like a spring. That exact nanosecond, a horde of Witchbeast’s fangs closed in on the spot the two had just been. The Rabbit’s fangs clattered against each other as the rabbits leapt off the ground in pursuit of the two.

Subaru: “We’re flying!?”

Beatrice: “We only jumped, in fact. I have reduced the effects of gravity with the Yin spell Murak, I suppose. If we desired, we could fly by riding the wind, in fact.”

Subaru: “You see we’re falling though!?”

Beatrice: “We could keep riding the wind if we were simply fleeing... But we are annihilating them, I suppose.”

Like leaves tossing in the wind, Subaru and Beatrice were buffeted by blizzard. They regardless failed to flip upside-down midair gracelessly, probably by Beatrice’s doing.

The two were descending slowly from their ten-meter high peak. The hares awaited, below them with their mouths gaping open, making Subaru put his hopes in another rally of magical spears.

Beatrice: “Subaru, a continuation in fact. Spiritual Arts Users do not cast magic by using their internal Mana, but by directly manipulating the ambient Mana, I suppose. A Contract with Micro Spirits is essential for this, so you are not currently meeting those requirements, in fact.”

Subaru: “Ah, uhhhhh, Beatrice-san? There’s, there’s kind of a whole bunch of them right under us!?”

Beatrice: “Just listen to me, I suppose. Your Gate is useless, and you cannot use Micro Spirits. So poor useless hopeless Subaru’s only role is to stay at Betty’s side and praise Betty’s magnificence, I suppose. Why are you even here, in fact?”

Subaru: “That’s what I wanna know!”

Beatrice: “Then I’ll teach you, I suppose.”

The Witchbeasts leaping up from below them would start reaching their feet in no time at all. If their fangs caught on, the rabbits would never let go. Even he had to find it overwhelmingly lame to take huge damage and start crying after how cool and composed he had acted previously.

Subaru yelled rather hysterically at Beatrice.

Subaru: “What do I do!?”

Beatrice: “Visualize, in fact. Imagine the same crystals that I made before, I suppose. They are crystallized Mana, spears weaved as corporeal magic. They become narrower to sharp points, with ruinous shards packed inside them, piercing through defenses and stabbing into flesh— Visualize this attack.”

Subaru: “Visualized!”

Beatrice: “Now all you must do is chant, I suppose!”

The horde of hares waited below them, mouths agape.

Red eyes, bloodstained maw, sharp fangs, instincts that viewed Subaru as merely a wad of meat. Utterly repugnant, utterly loathsome; this was the greatest adversary in Sanctuary.

Both: “—El Minya!!”

Subaru and Beatrice’s cantos mirrored each other, and the conjured spears rained down at the ground from on high.

Explosions and destruction rocked the ground of Sanctuary, eviscerating the ugly Witchbeast.

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Emilia: “Amazing...”

Sighed Emilia in admiration as she froze a rabbit that had slipped past solid.

Her amethyst eyes stayed fixed on Subaru and Beatrice, fighting the beast beyond the shroud of snow.

More specifically, Emilia’s eyes stay fixated on Beatrice as she held Subaru’s hand. Emilia herself was a Spiritual Arts User, who was using the Micro Spirits’ magic this very instant. She understood to a painful degree how incredible the magical confrontation unfolding in front of her was.

First, Beatrice was not receiving any magical reserves from Subaru.

They were definitely connected by the pass from their Contract. It was simply that Beatrice was abstaining herself from doing so. Subaru had been thrown into combat immediately after forming this Spirit Contract. If Beatrice siphoned the Mana she needed from him, he would not last.

Beatrice understood this, and was taking care not to burden Subaru.

Second, it was not that Beatrice was taking magic from Subaru— Rather, she was giving it to him.

It was not the most accurate of phrasings, but it was the truth. Subaru, as he held hands with Beatrice, was receiving Beatrice's support, allowing him to use magic that should be inaccessible to him. He was not using his Gate, and was instead using Beatrice's presence itself like a Gate.

There was no way that Subaru could possibly understand how monumental it was. Beatrice the Spirit was supplying the magic for both herself and Subaru, not from some outside source, but her own magical stockpile.

And third, she was legitimately witnessing advanced Yin magic.

The class of a magician's magical affinity would greatly influence their future. Specialization in any of the four main types of magic would separate them into distinct roles, and the same applied to the two special types of Yin and Yang. That meant that their essence differed greatly from the other four, even before reaching the advanced stages.

And then, there was the fact that they looked to be useless at first glance. They came with lots of negative sides, such as the time required to obtain results or the necessary quantity of magical power.

So the Yin and Yang affinities were both rare, and had few advanced practitioners.

Unlike the main four, many spells had been lost over time, making it a difficult environment to produce any new great magicians.

Yin had all these glaring issues, and Beatrice had nonetheless mastered it. And she was using ancient magic, long lost to time and history, as if it was nothing.

Emilia: "Woah, they went really high that time. Huh? They're gone... Oh, there they are."

The way they fought was so dreamlike and phantasmal that it made her lose her sense of reality. Though part of that probably was because Subaru and Beatrice were so amicably holding hands.

Emilia could tell that Subaru was fighting desperately, but Beatrice was even smiling a little. She had to be having a lot of fun. It was not that she enjoyed fighting or flaunting her power. It was just that doing this was fun for her.

Emilia: "———"

Emilia blinked, and Subaru and Beatrice had already moved to a completely different spot. It was teleportation magic similar to the more limited Door Crossing. Purple spears blasted through a row of hares from either end, the beasts shrieking furiously as they tried to leap at the two, only for their bodies to be caught by something midair, getting shredded apart.

Emilia strained her eyes. She spotted it.

The fragments from the detonated spear had not vanished, and instead sat suspended in space, as if frozen in time. The leaping rabbits slivered themselves on those splinters, ripping themselves apart. The crystalline trap was spread all across the area as the Witchbeasts moved, jumping, tumbling to resolutely attack the two, all while triggering the trap quite comically.

The Great Rabbit was a fearsome Witchbeast, but the individual rabbits were not that threatening.

They lacked any great power, and should an experienced fighter pay mind to the Rabbit's ferocity while fighting it, they would definitely come out ahead.

A fighting style as reckless as "follow your instinct to eat" would learn nothing. They wanted their fellow hares to be caught and be dismembered in the traps, because their hunger was everything. So they paid no heed to the fact they would die caught in the exact same trap after jumping at them, and become a cadaver.

Emilia: "Ah!"

Emilia slammed another rabbit that had escaped the siege with her magic. She dashed over to the frozen hare and kicked it to pieces without any hesitation. It shattered into shards of ice, so utterly deceased that it could not reform.

Subaru and Beatrice had been putting in such a good fight that only a surprisingly few hares had slipped past to Emilia. Emilia could even afford to concentrate on suppressing her own magical power.

But even as she watched Beatrice's display of overwhelming strength, Emilia could not erase the seeds of anxiety within her.

Beatrice's siege was powerful and cunning. The Great Rabbit kept catching itself in the trap, building a mountain of corpses. But Emilia could not see the end of it.

Emilia witnessed one of the rabbits trembling, when another hare appeared as if it had sprouted out of the first one's back. They repeated this on and on and on and on, the beasts multiplying like mice.

One-hundred hares multiplied into two-hundred in an instant, and into four-hundred in the next.

It had both numbers and wretched instincts ignorant to the concept of “stopping”. This was why this beast had been regarded as one of the Great Three, and had gone four-hundred years doing whatever it wishes as a calamity—

Emilia: “Subaru, Beatrice.”

Emilia called their names. Though they looked like they had an overwhelming advantage, they must not fall negligent.

Emilia would never forget how she had shivered after returning to the Tomb with Roswaal and Ram, and first confirmed the Great Rabbit's presence.

Those eyes regarded every single thing alive as nothing more than its food.

An entity truly incapable of any co-existence would make those who oppose it feel that utter despair. To oppose that overwhelming absurdity, Emilia had needed to demonstrate comparable power.

And those had been her intentions.

A torrent of magic churned within her, not fully under her control. It surely could not belong to her alone, and should she unleash it, it would annihilate the Great Rabbit. She would be offering her life in exchange. And she had been prepared to do that, had it come down to it.

Emilia: “Subaru...”

She murmured his name as he fought on.

He had known about the Rabbit's attack beforehand, and it did not seem that he was fighting it without a plan. He had brought Beatrice out of the Forbidden Library, and had made her look so full of life.

He would never do anything to bring gloom to that smile.

And so, Emilia believed in Natsuki Subaru.

White magic, capable of ending everything, asserted its presence in her heart. She suppressed it, advising that its time had yet to come.

—She believed in his words.

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For Subaru, using magic had always been equivalent to whittling away his soul.

At first it had been exactly like what Puck and Roswaal had said, that Subaru possessed not the slightest of talent as a magician. When he had first used Shamac, he was not able to keep himself from wringing out his Mana and could not move as a result.

The Bocco Fruit had been like doping in that instance. He used magic during his duel, even when he had been prohibited from doing so, and ultimately he abused his Gate so terribly that it collapsed.

He had no hope of being a magician.

Magic had saved Subaru many times, but he considered it something like whittling away at his already delicate core, sharpening it down, something like that. He thought it was inevitable that it would break.

And so, he had only dreamed about doing what he was doing now, firing off consecutive blasts of incredible magic, and could only think this reality impossible.

Subaru: “Hey, Beatrice! Should we really keep blasting them like this!?”

The Great Rabbit generated more rabbits than what Subaru and Beatrice defeated. The individual hares ate their dead brethren, steadily compounding in number. It seemed like they were using their multiplication as energy, for each rabbit grew more forceful the more their number increased.

That did encourage some dim hopes that, provided they kept buying time, the hares would eventually run out of energy to multiply themselves, but---

Beatrice: "There is no limit to their breeding, in fact. That's how they were created, I suppose. Even when they are close to being destroyed, they will not be destroyed. Unless you annihilate them all at once."

Subaru: "So what do we do? Do you have any ideas?"

Beatrice: "Subaru, are you trying to rely on adorable Betty for everything, I suppose?"

An explosion of crystal opened a hole in the mob, blasting the hares away, to be dismembered on the suspended shards. Beatrice saw this through as she pulled Subaru's arm and hopped into the air. Though neither her tug nor her jump had been that forceful, she easily succeeded in both.

Beatrice walked on air, dancing through space to avoid the rabbits' fangs as she weaved through gaps in her crystalline trap. The lack of a single drop of blood sullyng her extravagant dress proved that she felt not the slightest agitation or unease about the battle.

Beatrice: "We're moving, in fact."

Subaru: "Right."

With that, space bent, and the two engaged in a short-range teleport.

They crossed through space in a manner different from Door Crossing, reappearing behind the horde of hares. The beasts sniffed, but having lost Subaru and Beatrice, remained full of openings.

Beatrice: "You take the left, I suppose."

Subaru: "Right's all yours."

Visualize. Beatrice's magic reacted to Subaru's fantasy, manipulated the world, and brought about that transformation.

He definitely felt that he was benefiting at her expense, but that was why he was not playing around in the slightest.

The purple crystals of Yin's Minya spells formed in accordance to Subaru's imagination.

Subaru generated winding grooves on the projectiles to magnify their piercing force, before firing them off all at once. His hands never touched them, but they did fire according to his will.

It was like he was drawing a mental bowstring, to shoot incorporeal arrows.

They speared through the air, landing a direct hit on the undefended rabbits, blasting the mob of them screeching away. Beatrice's destruction had done the same thing to the right end of the mob, scattering them in all directions.

Fissures in space swallowed mobs of rabbits, sealing several hundreds inside a closed space as if in a picture frame. The hares hopped about beyond the looking-glass. Beatrice fired a crystalline spear at the heedless mob of hares— shattering the planar world to pieces, sending the hares inside to their end.

Subaru swallowed his breath, astonished at Beatrice's versatile magical skills.

While Subaru kept repeating Minya like an idiot, Beatrice tried entirely new combinations of Yin magic to annihilate the Great Rabbit, repeatedly. It was as if she was showing off every card she had in hand to Subaru. Or as if she was doing it to remind herself of her skills.

Beatrice: "About time, in fact."

Subaru: "Hm?"

The Great Rabbit had been cut down in number, only for it to instantly regenerate the exact quantity it had lost.

Subaru witnessed this, and again felt the same incongruity that he had been feeling for a while. Putting that together with Beatrice's muttering, Subaru felt the urge for a conversation.

Subaru: "Beatrice. They've been recovering the same number they lost... But doesn't it feel like they have never gone over their original amount?"

Supposing there were one thousand rabbits, if Subaru defeated one hundred of them, it would multiply to make one hundred more. If he defeated two hundred rabbit, he would get two hundred more rabbits.

The scales had not tipped once, no matter how many of them he killed. But Subaru had never seen them multiply beyond that highest number. Beatrice nodded to Subaru.

Beatrice: “Their multiplication itself may be unlimited, but there is likely a ceiling to how many of them there can be, in fact. So they cannot multiply beyond that, I suppose.”

Subaru: “Then, if we can finish off that ceiling all at once...”

Beatrice: “Theoretically, that will destroy it... But that presents its own difficulties, in fact.”

Subaru saw hope, but Beatrice made a complicated expression.

Well, of course. There were enough rabbits to drown out everything in sight. If magic to burn everything in visible range were possible, then they would be able to destroy the Rabbit, but how much power would it take to do it all in one second, and get all of them?

It was a violent plan akin to missile bombing the whole region. And if even one of them survived, they would instantly regenerate. The risk was far too great.

Subaru: “Then. okay. That’s it.”

Beatrice: “You’ve thought of something, I suppose?”

Subaru: “As usual, I’m utterly dependent on you, but yeah.”

Subaru watched the Witchbeast multiply as he whispered into Beatrice’s ear. Beatrice lowered her gaze in thought, and nodded.

Beatrice: “I’ve been thinking the same thing, in fact. But doing it would require...”

Subaru: “I know there’s a bottleneck. However! You better not get the wrong idea, Beatrice!”

Beatrice: “—?”

Subaru: “It’s not like we have to solve this problem on our own, yeah?”

Beatrice’s eyes widened at this. She gave a quiet sigh, pitching over in Subaru’s direction to set her forehead on his chest.

Beatrice: “Really, Subaru... You present some extraordinary solutions, in fact.”

Subaru: “I do promise to be such a thrillingly fresh and novel Contractor that you will never ever get bored.”

Subaru shot her a thumbs-up, his teeth sparkling. Beatrice smiled wryly before looking up, her face against his chest.

Beatrice: “Fine, I suppose. Let’s do it, in fact. But even Betty needs time to pull this off, I suppose. Let’s see you manage well over that period, in fact.”

Subaru: “Just pretend you are relaxing on a safe sturdy boat. It’s what I’m doing.”

Beatrice: “We will see who will be doing the paddling, I suppose.”

Beatrice pushed away from Subaru’s chest. She drew in a breath, closed her eyes, and begun focusing on escalating her magic.

Seeing this, Subaru psyched himself up and kicked off the snow.

The Witchbeast’s fangs clicked and clattered as it chased Subaru, running. Silhouettes swooped for his legs. But they were too slow. After the slaughters he had endured these past two days, the Great Rabbit looked wimpy.

Subaru: “Out of the way! Move it! I don’t have the time to deal with you right now!”

Subaru dodged the fangs, kicked away the hares.

He chanted, using crystal spears to force open a path as he charged through the clearing with Beatrice cradled in his arms, sprinting back to the Tomb.

Emilia: “Huh, wha, Subaru!?”

Emilia looked shocked as she witnessed Subaru’s return.

Subaru slid to a stop beside her before placing Beatrice, her eyes closed, on the snowy ground beside him and stroking her head.

Subaru: “Sorry, Emilia-tan! We’re having some trouble pulling it off on our own!”

Emilia: “I... I mean, that’s fine, but... What do we do now? Right, I’m going to——”

Subaru: “No, we have an idea for how to beat it. You don’t have to use your suicide bomber absolute death moves. Or actually, just don’t use them, period. It will make all our efforts until now pointless.”

Emilia swallowed her breath and stared intently at Subaru’s face. Had she seriously thought he would not figure it out? She seriously had, had she not? Of course Emilia would bring harm to herself to land the decisive blow, if truly backed into a corner in a situation like this. What an impossible girl.

She should stop thinking that it was okay to hurt herself if it saves everyone.

Subaru: “It’s best that everyone’s safe and everyone’s saved, duh.”

Emilia: “...Subaru.”

Subaru: “So Emilia-tan, I have kind of a crazy request. If it doesn’t look feasible, then I’ll think on it more, but if it looks feasible then I want to see your best—— Let’s all win this together.”

Emilia: “———”

Emilia put her hand to her chest, seemingly feeling something about Subaru’s statement, blinking several times. Subaru conjured crystal spears and fired them at the Witchbeast horde to hold them in check, buying time for Emilia to come to her decision. But it did not end up taking long at all.

Emilia: “Alright. Let’s do this, Subaru. I’m ready for anything.”

Answered Emilia, steeling her resolve, her eyes filled with determination. Subaru pumped his fists as he glanced back to her.

Subaru: “That’s the spirit. Here we go!”

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Subaru felt incredible magic swelling beside him, coming from both sides. Emilia stood on his left, and Beatrice on his right.

Each of them held one of Subaru's hands, linking the three of them together. There was no real significance to them doing this. It was just to motivate Subaru.

In context of battle, you could call "motivation" "morale". And high morale was essential for dictating the tide of battle.

Subaru: "Visualize, visualize, visualize!"

Subaru envisioned the wicked, powerful, magical assault.

He creates pointed amethyst spears and bombarded the siege of approaching hares. He fought his hardest, repeating volley after volley to keep the rabbits from reaching either themselves or the Tomb.

Subaru was not using his own Mana to cast this magic. But to say he was casting without suffering any strain— would be a complete misunderstanding.

He was getting the Mana he needed to cast the spells from Beatrice, but Subaru was the one regulating the magic. He visualized the spears' force, their aim, their quantity, materialized and fired them, instantly moving to the next attack.

Were he an actual magician, he would be suffering even more bodily fatigue alongside. He could not hope to imagine the immense burden and concurrent workload. No wonder he was told he lacked talent for magic.

The spears slammed against the ground, shockwaves and detonations sending the hares flying as they screeched in protest. Their fangs clicked and chittered and clicked and chittered and clicked and with the howling blizzard as accompaniment, it sounded like the cogwheels of hell, or something to that effect.

The cogs on the grim conveyor to send Subaru's team to the guillotine pressed ever closer.

Subaru: "Minya! Minya! Ah, crap! Biting my tongue on this magic!"

While grumbling about the hard-to-pronounce incantation, Subaru took aim at the charging Rabbit. He fired the conjured crystals, and the leading rabbit's head— went untouched, as the spear hit the ground before it, the shockwave pushing it back into the mob.

This was the first stage of the operation.

Subaru was controlling the horde with his conjured spears, but he was not killing them. They wanted to avoid disrupting the ceiling, and having the rabbits multiply at some indefinite juncture. He was keeping the Great Rabbit at its maximum number while pinning it in place. Although,

Subaru: "If you're attracted to the smell of Mana, then there's no way you're prying your attention from us."

After all, there were two people here maintaining nigh-unwitnessed magnitudes of Mana. And they were both beautiful girls. Subaru, right now, had flowers in both hands. Anyone would envy him.

Subaru: "Visualize, visualize, visualize... come on, you gotta be jealous! Try coming closer!"

Not neglecting to taunt the animal, Subaru hummed. Although the beasts would not understand.

Part of it was to inflame the enemy, but it was more about Subaru encouraging himself. If he pretended that this extraordinary situation was an ordinary one, he would manage to keep himself going.

If he did not do this, he could not guarantee that his knees would remain steady. Both of his hands felt warmth. With this touch on his palms, he absolutely could not show the pathetic side of himself.

Subaru: "Visualize, visualize, visualize...!"

Muttered Subaru over and over as he strained his eyes.

The horde of hares had pushed forward; there was a limit to how far Subaru could restrain them. But preparations were not in place yet.

Not Emilia's, nor Beatrice's, nor Subaru's.

Emilia: "...Subaru."

He felt someone squeeze his hand, and looked to find Emilia gazing at him, her eyes faintly open. Her preparations were complete, then? She was smiling, awaiting Subaru's signal.

Subaru: "-----"

Pushed onward by Emilia's gaze, Subaru strained his bloodshot eyes further.

The curtain of the blustering blizzard was thick, constantly concealing and revealing the places he was trying to keep an eye on. But the sight of their wriggling, white forms did inform Subaru of the slight difference between the Witchbeast and the snowbanks.

—Just a little more, a tiny, right there, there, there, there!

Subaru grit his teeth. Waited for the moment.

Confirming that the front, the sides, all of it, everything was correct, Subaru's eyes shot open.

Subaru: "Now, Emilia! Follow the lines!!"

Shouting, Subaru squeezed down on Emilia's hand.

Emilia's amethyst gaze focused firmly to the front as she looked at the lines Subaru had drawn.

While he had kept the Rabbit in check with conjured spears, Subaru had been simultaneously drawing lines across the earth with Mana. Using formless Mana to gouge into the ground had been of utmost difficulty.

But Subaru, as talentless as people called him, had overcome that ordeal by a combination of focus and pretensions that far exceeded those of the ordinary person. The ones that disallowed him from looking uncool around others, those pretensions.

He had drawn four lines in total. Four long lines, that formed a box around the mass of rabbits. Lines that would tell Emilia where to aim.

Emilia: "Excellent, Subaru! You did reeeally wonderful!"

Cheered Emilia at his beautiful set-up, saying things she would usually never say.

Emilia raised her right hand, Subaru's hand still in her grip, and placed the left hand, half-frozen by her own runaway magical power, atop it. And, chanted.

Emilia: "—Al Huma!!"

A gigantic amount of magical power surged as the world transformed in accordance to Emilia's canto. Mana rushed to Emilia and Subaru's linked hands before shooting into the atmosphere, piercing through the earth, and converging with Subaru's lines of Mana.

—The earth bellowed as something incredible occurred.

Subaru: "Woah..."

Subaru witnessed the event as an unintended astonished voice escaped his lips.

Well, of course. Anyone who witnessed this would react the same way.

Emilia's magic traced over the lines that Subaru had drawn— and all the snow within the box started levitating.

All the rabbits within the box remained atop the snow platform, but they had yet to notice that the tremors had happened because the ground beneath them was floating.

It may be a limited space, but the floating platform was still about twenty by twenty meters. The sight of so many hares crowded together, shuddering on top of this platform, beautifully demonstrated the supernatural nature of magic.

Subaru: "Emilia!"

Emilia: "Got it! I'm not letting them get away!"

But if they stopped there, then the Rabbit would just jump off the platform. There was one more thing they had to do to keep it from escaping. Emilia raised their linked hands up high— and brought them right down.

The floating snowfield rumbled. Surely, the Rabbit had never imagined what would happen.

A roar, and a frigid blast of stabbing wind.

It showered over Subaru and the others, as they kept their eyes fixated on the platform to see its results through.

—By the time the wind stopped, the snowfield had been vertically shut.

The left and right ends of Emilia's floating platform had folded to meet at the center. The ground had been shut in the same manner as a book, sealing the Rabbit inside the snow without any means of escape.

Subaru hurriedly looked over the closed platform's surroundings. They missed— none. Movement— not a shadow.

All the rabbits were in one place, trapped in an extraordinarily small area. With this,

Subaru: "The big one's all on you, Beatrice!"

Subaru called to Beatrice, telling her that the secondary set-up was complete. Hearing this, and having quietly chanted the canto the entire time, Beatrice's eyes opened.

Witnessing the sight before her, Beatrice laughed quietly.

It was not surprise. Nor was it anything like that. A smile abounding with trust arose on her face—

Beatrice: "Here is the ultimate in Yin— Al Shamac."

The instant she whispered the canto, shadow drowned out the world.

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—For a moment, it was at the mercy of something like vertigo. But it really did only last for a moment.

The vertigo stopped, and a shock impacted its feet. Then the bondage pressing down on its body disappeared. It started off by giving a big shake to get the snow off its fur.

It sniffed the air, looking around the area.

Its eyes, its nose, its ears, all got the better of it as they prioritized the hunt for prey. Its red eyes glanced about as it searched for sweet-smelling game.

Nothing. There had been prey so delicious that it made its stomach wrench painfully, right in front of it, just a second ago. With tender flesh and sweet blood, prey that could possibly sate this starvation even temporarily had definitely been right there.

Its nose smelled nothing. Its eyes saw nothing. Its ears heard nothing. The prey was gone. It looked around. Nowhere in sight.

Hunger instantly overwrote its disappointment. To distract itself from its hunger and urge to chew, it decided to bite into the white mass beside itself. It gnashed it, shredded its flesh, slurped its blood while clawing out its innards. It chewed away to its heart's content, swallowed it down, and then noticed that identical meals were unfolding all around it.

The available pray had decreased.

It did not feel like it was in danger, but in accordance with its survival instincts, it bit off the head of another white mass that frantically consumed all around it. Bit into it, and swallowed it down.

And this repeats. And repeats. Spurred on by endless hunger, it goes to the neighboring prey, and the prey next to that, and the prey next to that, and the prey next to that, and the prey next to next to next to next to next to—

Eventually, after devouring everything around, it was the only thing left.

It licked up the blood soaking the ground, leaving not a single scrap of gore or blood-soaked grass left. Once it tidily cleaned up the remains of the meal, it truly was alone.

But even with meat in its stomach, starvation far exceeding its body mass assaulted it.

It cried out, teeth chattering, on the periphery of madness. Unending starvation, insatiable hunger. The maddening lack of release, no matter how much it ate.

Mother must have felt this too.

For an instant, a mysterious thought passed through a mind dominated by hunger.

The indistinct thing had been a simple flash of emotion, nothing so cultivated as to reach language. And it, too, vanished eternally in the face of maddening hunger.

The creature trembled, trembled violently. It shrieked as it felt its innards churn about, and it unconsciously created another entity. This sudden, new white mass tumbled back-first onto the ground, as if it had forgotten how to walk. Every single one of its organs registered this thing as prey, and it bit into the tumbling mass without any hesitation.

It swallowed it down without even allowing it to shriek. After eating, the hunger still tormented it. And after all this agonized struggling, another creature other than itself was born into the world.

And it repeated, and it repeated, the same thing going on and on and on and on.

It was alone now. Nothing else existed in this world. There were buildings, and forests, and ground, and air and wind, but no prey. It was alone.

And so it proceeded to eat.

Eventually, even it was devoured by another stomach, and disappeared. The new lonely one repeated and repeated it all until it was no longer, as the world turned.

—Insatiable hunger would never be sated.

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The momentary presence of the incredible shadow made Subaru swallow his breath.

Subaru: “———”

The black orb that Beatrice’s canto had created swallowed the snowfield trapping the Rabbit that Emilia had sealed, then proceeded to shrink smaller and smaller, before eventually shrinking smaller than a marble and silently vanishing.

Even Subaru, who did not know the theory behind this feat, understands what it meant.

Al Shamac, the greatest of Shamac spells, was magic that disturbed space.

The magic had swallowed the Rabbit and the snowfield, then blasted them all into another dimension. Neither regeneration nor multiplication would mean anything anymore.

Because it was literally another world's issue.

Subaru: "I know I did... ask you to send them into an isolated space like the Forbidden Library, but..."

Beatrice: "Do I hear dissatisfaction, I suppose?"

Subaru's voice trembled before the incredible feat, while Beatrice pouted beside him. She put her hands to her hips, quite displeased with Subaru's attitude.

Emilia: "Seriously, wow..."

The whole thing made Emilia's eyes open wide as well.

Emilia was more learned in magic than Subaru, so her surprise was happening on another vector. Her powers had probably settled in somewhat after half-freezing herself and using such immense magic. Once she figured out how to control it, she would probably be fine.

Subaru looked around, confirming that nothing was present where the Rabbit used to be.

Then he glanced behind him, and confirmed that the Tomb had been secured too. Peeking out from the Tomb was an expressionless mob of Ryuzus. It looked like the Ryuzu doubles had all managed to reach safety as well.

Roswaal was leaning against the wall beside the Tomb's entrance, Ram in his arms. Ram's hand was touching Roswaal's cheek, and Subaru could see that Roswaal was crying.

Subaru: "-----"

Witnessing that, Subaru felt the weight in his chest disappear.

There were still so many things that they had to talk about. Otto, Garfiel, and the others were still back at the mansion. He did believe they were safe, but they needed to meet up and talk. And on this side, too, he had so many things to ask Emilia.

But somehow, it felt like everything was all right. There were so many things he had not confirmed yet. But seeing Roswaal crying, and Ram smiling softly as she watched him, made Subaru feel that everything was all right.

Emilia: “Subaru, come on!”

Subaru took a breather, until Emilia suddenly poked his cheek.

Emilia smiled at Subaru when he looked back at her, and then gestured to the area behind him. Where Beatrice stood with her arms folded, still looking sulky.

Beatrice: “I believe that the ace deserves a few words, in fact.”

Beatrice puffed out her cheeks. Subaru replies with a nod. And—

Beatrice: “Ah, eep!”

Subaru slipped his hands under her arms and lifted her right up. He ignored her adorable yelp, embracing her as he spun around on the spot.

Subaru: “You did it! Knew you could, I’m so in love with you, Beako!!”

Beatrice: “Wh— hold it! Sto— let me— let me go, I suppose! Betty isn’t...”

Subaru: “Yes yes yes! You are adorable! Beako is wonderful! Beako is supreme! All hail Beako!”

Showering her in praise, Subaru spun round and around with Beatrice in his arms. Beatrice’s face flashed beet red as Emilia watched them frolic, her gaze awfully gentle.

The Spirit and Contractor, spinning and spinning in an energetic expression of delight—

Both: “Ah!”

—Lost their footing at the last moment, and happily plunged face-first into the snow together.

Arc 4 Interlude I - Each Gives Concession

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 15, Closing Chapter “Meeting Each Other Halfway”, Parts 1-3

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by SummaryAnon — [Complete](#), Page 319

Subaru: “—Aaand, done!”

Subaru stuck two twigs into the heap of snow before him, then wiped the sweat from his brow. It was the work of an amateur, thrown together in an hour, but he still had to be impressed at the results.

Murmurs of admiration spread through the onlooking crowd as well.

Subaru: “Yeah, I must have a talent for this stuff. If we’re ever hurting for food money, we can make it snow, and make it as the esteemed snow artists of the nation.”

Emilia: “Stop being so silly. I’m not going to make it snow to help you with that. But it really does look reeeally good.”

Said Emilia with a white puff of breath as she sat on the stone steps, observing Subaru’s work. Reflected in her amethyst eyes was Subaru’s snowman— but since labelling it as a snowman wouldn’t quite describe it correctly, perhaps it was better to call it a snow sculpture.

There were now about 20 sculptures of Puck crafted from the leftover snow in Sanctuary. What had compelled Subaru to make so many? Were you to ask him, he would only be able to answer with “copious romanticism”.

But it was making Emilia and Sanctuary’s people happy, so that shallow justification had would suffice.

???: “I’m sure that you’re not trying to be, but you truly are an idiot, Barusu.”

There was someone else, judging Subaru harshly.

The speaker was a girl, currently seated on the steps with her head on Emilia's lap. She was dressed out of her trademark maid uniform and currently wore a simple white outfit.

Her clothes had burned as she wandered between life and death. While her face did look paler than usual, neither her tone nor venom had changed. So everything was good.

Subaru: "The two of you keep ganging up to call dumb. I did put in quite a bit of work throughout this whole mess, so can't you be nicer to me? I could use a little more commendation."

Emilia: "Mhm, you are right. I'm reeeeeeally grateful, Subaru. But I was the one doing work when you were away, so actually I'd like commendation too."

Subaru: "The stuff you've started saying, Emilia-tan."

Though, Emilia did deserve praise for protecting Sanctuary during Subaru's absence. It was uncertain whether the residents would have escaped the Rabbit had Emilia not instructed them to go in the Tomb. And had Emilia not cleared the Trials, there would have been nowhere to take shelter anyway.

Neither was it certain that Subaru would have thought to use the Tomb as a shelter. Since his thoughts had been focused on escaping before the snow came.

Subaru: "Well, we'll call it a happy mistake that the Men's Brigade came back and sparked your motivation, Emilia-tan. Seriously, thank you."

This was true for previous affairs too, but this whole series of events had involved far too many gambles.

It felt like Subaru could not manage on his own, and constantly had others rescuing him. Even though he had decided to take the hardest parts upon himself, ideally.

Emilia: "But of course, though. If you do absolutely everything for me, Subaru, I will stop knowing what I'm even doing here. You've done enough zipping around that it's okay for you to rest a little."

Subaru: "No, it's just that when I want to help with all the brains and brawn I don't have, running around like an idiot's all I can do."

Emilia: "But that's going to change, yes?"

Said Emilia teasingly, suppressing a laugh as she stroked Ram's head. Subaru instantly understood and rubbed his finger under his nose as he replied with a "Yeah".

He had made many mistakes, and others had been constantly rescuing him, but he had managed to save basically everything he needed to. And he would never agonize over these issues alone again. Subaru would no longer hesitate to rely on others, would not slack in his own efforts either, and had people to give him a good kick in the ass when needed.

Subaru: "-----"

Subaru looked up, shifting his gaze from the clearing to the Tomb.

His gaze went past Emilia as she sat on the steps, all the way to the entrance of the Tomb. Inside that place, its Trial mechanism absent, were two people.

What could they be discussing inside? It was a concern on Subaru's mind.

Subaru: "Well, even I have enough tact not to interrupt them."

There had been a wealth of opportunities to speak, but they had not spoken to each other.

Surely, they had mountains of things to discuss.

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A girl and a man faced each other with a transparent coffin between them.

Girl: "Mother..."

Murmured the girl as she looked at the woman in the crystal coffin.

It felt like she was floating, like her feet were not touching the ground. Some of it was due to the remaining rush of battle, some of it was due to her feelings of loss and liberation from losing her old haunt, and most of it was due to the surreal sight before her.

She had never thought that she would see her mother again.

The woman in the coffin, the Witch, Echidna, looked not at all different from Beatrice's memories. Long, white, beautiful hair alongside her intelligent yet gentle features. It vividly revived memories of how she used to smile at Beatrice, though it had only happened rarely.

Beatrice: "Betty... was not able to keep her promise to you, I suppose. I'm sorry."

Beatrice stroked the coffin with her fingers, beginning the four-hundred-year reunion with an apology.

Back when they parted, Echidna had instructed Beatrice to give her stockpile of knowledge to That Person. Had given her abundant books to fill the Library, and a Gospel that told the future.

Beatrice no longer had either.

The Gospel telling the future that Echidna desired of Beatrice, and all the knowledge that Echidna had amassed, both had departed the world as ashes.

Beatrice: "Betty never even met That Person... and the books have burned, in fact. I have done too many things I must apologize for, I suppose."

"I'm a terrible daughter", thought Beatrice.

A foolish daughter who was not able to achieve even one of her mother's requests over four centuries. Now she was meeting her mother who she could not even face, and she should be apologizing profusely, but—

???: "...You look raaaaaaaather refreshed."

Muttered the man across from her, easily disclosing her thoughts.

Beatrice glanced up to see a man with long hair arise from the shadow, smiling weakly. It was Roswaal. He was supposed to be a familiar face, but Beatrice couldn't keep herself from feeling offput by him. Perhaps because his eyes, always crazed in pursuit of his goals ever since Beatrice had met him, now looked uncertain— and because he was missing his clown makeup, his face bare.

Beatrice: "Roswaal, you best me in terms of refreshed, in fact. Making my presence without cosmetics means violating the instructions from your predecessor, I suppose."

Roswaal: “The clown make-up was a sort of war paint for me, yoooooooo see. Wearing it let me interact with others with enthusiasm, as though I were donning a mask. But there is soooooooooomething I realized.”

Beatrice: “Yes?”

Roswaal: “That regardless of the make-up, I am aaaaaaan absolute clown. So how meaningful is it, truly, that I neglect my cosmetics?”

Beatrice: “I see, in fact.”

Beatrice nodded as Roswaal gives a joking shrug. She fiddles with her pigtails in silence, breaking it with “Now”,

Beatrice: “You must have things to say to Mother, I suppose. Reunion with her has been your... has been your family’s deepest wish, in fact.”

Roswaal: “...”

Beatrice: “You are perhaps the tenth Roswaal since the progenitor who directly knew Mother, I suppose. The heads of the Mathers family have been short-lived for generations, so the visitors to the Library shifted rather steadily, in fact... You’ve been different ever since childhood, I suppose.”

Beatrice may not have been deeply involved in the history of the Mathers Family, but she did watch from aside how their affairs had progressed.

The first Roswaal had been Echidna’s only student. Though he had lost almost all his magical ability in his fight with the Warlock Hector, he did not give up on being Echidna’s student afterwards.

He had frequented the Library even after Echidna’s death, disregarding the dazed Beatrice as he obsessively searched and searched and searched for something, and likely gave that something to his descendant before dying.

Ever since, all the descendants from Roswaal’s line had demonstrated magical capabilities close to those of their progenitor, and the Mathers family expanded.

And the current Roswaal— The man standing in front of Beatrice. Roswaal L. Mathers exhibited the most supreme talent out of all the Roswaals yet. He was such a genius that, secretly, even Beatrice had to shiver.

His power eclipsed that of his ancestor who Echidna had singled out personally, and could have done anything he wanted, with his claim as one of the strongest magicians in the world.

Beatrice: “You had all that talent, and you still failed to escape the Mathers’ curse, in fact. Your family has been obsessed with the thoughts of reuniting with my deceased Mother, this cruel path one you strived to walk. Betty sympathizes with you somewhat, I suppose.”

Roswaal: “Do you? But how are you and we any different? You spent four centuries bound by the words of your deceased mother. It’s identical. Or rather, unlike my family’s shifting over the generations, you suffered pain in solitude beyond what anyone can empathize. We did what we needed to strive forward toward our goal. You simply suffered in place.”

In response to Beatrice’s words, Roswaal replied, his words even graver.

“In the end, we’re both bad”, she thought.

Roswaal’s family had inherited the same feelings over lives upon short lives, in pursuit of a single reunion.

Beatrice had been trapped in an empty cage for the entirety of her eternal lifespan, waiting for the day she could fulfill her promise.

An objective onlooker would see them as equally foolish clowns.

The two glared at each other in silence. But their silent competition ended once Roswaal averted his gaze.

Roswaal: “This is a tedious argument. When two fools point at the other whilst mocking their foolishness, we begin crossing the boundaries of vain comedy.”

Beatrice: “...You are correct there, in fact.”

Roswaal: “Do you mind me asking something?”

Roswaal raised his finger. Beatrice silently looked up, expressing her consent by neglecting to reject him.

Roswaal looked down at Echidna as she slept in the coffin.

Roswaal: “Did Subaru-kun manage to be That Person of yours?”

The expression “That Person” made Beatrice swallow her breath. She had never spoken directly with Roswaal about That Person. But Beatrice did not think it was strange for him to learn about her from sources outside her knowledge.

And thinking back on it, the people who had visited the Library until now had ultimately been brought there by Roswaals up to the previous generation. The Roswaals could have easily heard the story from them and passed it on to their descendants.

And honestly, one could say that even Subaru had been brought there by Roswaal.

—Not that Subaru would accept that if he were told so.

Roswaal: “...Why are you laughing?”

Beatrice: “—Ah. Sorry, I suppose. I’m not laughing at you, Roswaal, in fact. It just made me imagine something amusing, I suppose.”

It amused Beatrice how she had managed to figure out, with pinpoint accuracy, what the black-haired man would say. Perhaps he was just that straightforward. She did not want to think any further into it than that.

Either way, Beatrice shook her head.

Beatrice: “That man is... Subaru is not fit to be my That Person, in fact.”

Roswaal: “...Huh.”

Beatrice: “Subaru lacks all kinds of qualifications to inherit the knowledge of Mother’s Forbidden Library, I suppose. He has no ambition to educate himself with the knowledge or to use it for his purposes, and he lacks the fundamental background to do either, in fact. And he looks dumb and he’s flimsy and he’s useless at magic and his legs are short, I suppose. He is not Betty’s awaited That Person in any way.”

Roswaal: “That soooooooooounds quiiiiiiiiite the harsh opinion.”

Beatrice: “Exactly, I suppose. Betty is harsh, in fact. And so, every opportunity that came to me over these four centuries, Betty rebuffed them with That Person, in fact.”

Beatrice did feel something like guilt towards all those who had tried to take her out of the Library, as she thought back on it now. Not all of them had reached out to Beatrice while thinking only in their own interests. Some of them had spoken kindly to her.

But Beatrice had cast away every single hand that reached for her.

Beatrice: “I know that I should have chosen That Person, I suppose. That I should have faced everyone who called to me, individual by individual, and properly thought out my answer, in fact. I was meant to choose someone suitable to inherit the Library, Echidna’s knowledge. That has to be what it was, I suppose.”

Roswaal: “However, you say that the one you chose, Subaru-kun, is unfit to be That Person?”

Beatrice: “I do, in fact. There is no issue, I suppose. Betty’s choice is Subaru, in fact. Not That Person. I chose Subaru, I suppose.”

Beatrice saw how Roswaal’s breath hitched, his eyes open wide.

It had to be a difficult answer for him to accept, considering how he had devoted himself to Echidna. Beatrice had been in the exact same position as him until only a moment ago. She understood how Roswaal felt so much that it hurt.

And because she understood, she had to explain it at length.

Beatrice: “Subaru laughed at me when I begged him to be That Person, in fact. He claimed that he could make me happier than someone I have never seen, I suppose.”

Roswaal: “What a... prideful thing to say.”

Beatrice: “I don’t dislike that forcefulness, in fact.”

Rather than enticing her with polite speech, explaining to her what she should do, and clarifying how he would use Echidna's knowledge, he had been utterly candid.

Roswaal: "But no matter what he preaches, Subaru-kun will not place you as number one. It is obvious simply by looking at him... You must already recognize this."

Beatrice: "Roswaal, you do not seem to understand, I suppose."

Roswaal: "I don't?"

Beatrice: "Betty did not leave the Library because she is Subaru's number one, in fact. I left the Library because I want Subaru to be my number one, I suppose."

He had told her to choose him.

He had told her that he would be too lonely to live without her.

Convenient prattle, she thought. Pleasant platitudes, she thought.

But it did sway Beatrice's heart. It had resonated. It took her heart, which had remained sealed stuck in one place for four hundred years, and gave it a jolt.

Now that she knew the feeling of liberation she felt the instant she took his hand and left the Library, and how it had almost brought her to tears, her heart just would not stop.

Beatrice: "Abandoning my post may disqualify me as Mother's Spirit, but I don't mind, in fact. Betty is Contractor Natsuki Subaru's Spirit, I suppose. My regret and shame for that... is gone, I suppose."

Roswaal might consider it a betrayal.

He had also been bound for four centuries by Echidna's curse, and perhaps Beatrice's announcement that she escaped it first was a betrayal to him. She did not escape by fulfilling her role, but by abandoning it.

If she was going to face her Mother, or face Roswaal, she had to rationalize that.

Beatrice: "———"

Her heart was already resolved. She had already taken that hand.

Beatrice was going to live a life so vivid it would never fade to sepia. Something so intense that, no matter how the years drag on, she would never forget those important to her.

So she kept silent, waiting for Roswaal to reply.

Roswaal: “You do not have to brace yourself. I am not the spokesman of Echidna the Witch. I have no right to intrude on your answer, whatever it may be. Just do what you wish.”

Beatrice: “Roswaal...”

Roswaal: “And even had you not abandoned it, you would have never fulfilled Echidna’s orders. Because I would have prioritized my own desires over you and sacrificed you. If we are to speak of betrayals, that constitutes a significant one.”

Beatrice: “——”

Penitently, Roswaal acknowledged his wrongdoings for what had happened in the mansion.

Just as Beatrice had realized in the Library, Roswaal had been the one plotting to take Beatrice’s life. She had wondered if it was written in Roswaal’s Gospel. Though she did not see how it all connected.

Beatrice: “Roswaal. What happened to your Gospel, I suppose?”

Roswaal: “...It’s burned to nothing. Thanks to a wicked maid who deeeeeeeefied her master. The future is in ashes now. And perhaps eeeeeeeeeeverything is.”

Beatrice: “Everything is hollow, and you cannot see the future... But instead, you look considerably refreshed, in fact.”

Roswaal: “—I wonder iiiiiiiiiif I am.”

Roswaal cast his gaze down in reply to Beatrice’s perfect repeat of their previous conversation. He reached for Echidna in the coffin, for her untouchable fingertips.

Roswaal: “I am sad that I have lost the definite path to the answer I seek, and scared. But perhaps I am

also happy to read a story that I could have never read before. Though, because I have not felt like this in over four centuries now, I cannot tell whether it's legitimate or not."

Beatrice: "———?"

Beatrice scrunched her brows. Something about that statement felt off. Seeing her confusion made Roswaal smile slightly.

"We have not spoken nearly enough", he said with some self-deprecation.

Roswaal: "It can't be dismissed as beeeeeeeing beyond our control. At first, there was a need to be blindly fixated, but after that we did have time. We spent so much time in the same mansion. And even so, even though we had seen the same things, I kept avoiding you like I was scared of talking about it."

Beatrice: "Roswaal, what are you trying to say, I suppose?"

Roswaal: "I'm saying that it could've been like it used to be... That we could have spent our last four-hundred years like we did in Teacher's laboratory together."

Beatrice: "Teach...!?"

Finding an old, familiar word in Roswaal's quiet speech, Beatrice swallowed her breath. She breathed a shaky breath as she swallowed down the implications——

Beatrice: "Impossible, are... you, Roswaal?"

Roswaal: "I've always been Roswaal?"

Beatrice: "No! Not like that... You have to know what I mean, I suppose!"

Roswaal: "I'm merely jesting. And you're correct. I'm—— It's me, Beatrice. Roswaal."

The instant he interrupted himself, Beatrice saw Roswaal in double.

She saw a tall man with long navy hair, and a young man with hair the same color. That was the brilliant youth who used to adore Echidna and tagged along everywhere behind her.

Beatrice: "But, then... Roswaal, this... How!?"

Roswaal: "I am using one of Teacher's theories from her hunt for immortality, soul transcription. I adopted the least risky of the experiments conducted in this Sanctuary, and tested it on myself."

Beatrice: "Soul transcription... That's the experiment to transcribe your consciousness and memories into an empty vessel, achieving subjective immortality... But that experiment ended in failure because the souls failed to adhere, in fact!"

Roswaal: "Transcribed souls are pretty poor at adhering to empty vessels. That was a setback, but... If the problem is an issue of familiarity between the soul and vessel, then I overcame that problem by increasing that familiarity quotient."

The research had faced setbacks due to problems of familiarity between vessel and soul.

After Ryuzu Meyer became the nexus of Sanctuary, Echidna's crazed thirst for knowledge had led her to consider adopting the crystallized Ryuzu for other experiments.

But the Ryuzu doubles lacked any quality that would let them accept foreign souls, and the experiment ended in failure. Roswaal was saying that he bested this issue by associating the vessel with the soul. After mulling over this, Beatrice finally understood what Roswaal's presence truly meant.

—By transcribing his soul into the body of his descendants, entities close to himself, the first Roswaal had continuously extended the path to fulfill his goal.

Roswaal: "Are you going to call me inhuman, Beatrice?"

Beatrice: "..."

Roswaal: "Are you going to call it outrageous that I, desiring only my reunion with Teacher, committed the atrocity of assembling my ignorant children as vessels?"

Roswaal's words stabbed into Beatrice.

But the way Roswaal gazed so calmly at her made it almost seem that he was waiting for her to lambaste him.

So Roswaal wished to face judgement too? Just like her, when she informed him that she had abandoned her Contract with Echidna?

Roswaal must want to ask Beatrice, who knew Echidna, about the morality of his actions. About his four-hundred-year obsession, his unrequited love that had done nothing but inconvenience others.

Beatrice: "...It's not my job to say anything about it, in fact. I know how this sounds, but Betty's relationships with your descendants were shallow, I suppose. Though, thinking on it now, they were all just you, in fact. So I feel no disgust that you have used your children as stepping stones other than my gut reaction, I suppose. My thoughts on it are «euch», in fact."

Roswaal: "«Euch», huh. Hooooooooow harsh."

Beatrice: "But that is all I think, I suppose. Actually, I am overjoyed that a friend from four-hundred years ago is still alive, in fact."

Roswaal: "...I, see."

Roswaal closed his eyes. That might not have been the reply that Roswaal had been looking for, but Beatrice did not care. She was conveying her emotions honestly. That was how she resolved herself to be when she left the Library. And now—

Beatrice: "Roswaal. Squat down for a moment, I suppose."

Roswaal: "Squat? Here?"

Roswaal tilted his head as Beatrice pointed to the ground beside her. Beatrice nodded. Roswaal's eyes widened as he obediently squatted down on the spot.

Beatrice watched Roswaal squat down as she removed her right shoe. She grasped it firm in her right hand, and,

Beatrice: "Clench your teeth, in fact."

Roswaal: "—Gah!?"

Roswaal's face now rested at the perfect height to get slapped with a shoe.

The satisfying slap echoed through the room as it whacked Roswaal's face aside. He put his hand to his reddened cheek, eyes spinning. During his confusion, Beatrice had put her shoe back on.

Beatrice: “Since I’m generous, I’ll say that’s enough to forgive you, I suppose. It’s just consequences speaking for consequences, in fact. Subaru seems to forgive you too, so I may as well let you off, I suppose.”

Roswaal: “...And I think that’s your hindsight bias speaking, after everything ended with no deaths.”

Beatrice: “It is, in fact. Also, Subaru is amazing for all the work he did to prevent any deaths, I suppose. You ought to take a lesson from him, in fact.”

Roswaal: “—Ha, hahaha! Reeeeeeeally now! I ought to take a lesson from him! Ahaha! That is... Ahh, is that not, geeeeeeeeeenuinely humorous?”

Roswaal laughed as if Beatrice, hands on her hips, had just told him an excellent joke. He could not keep himself from pitching back in laughter and bonking his head on the wall. Then he struck the back of his head against the wall several times more, before giving a deep sigh.

Roswaal: “Sorry— But I do not feel that I have done anything wrong. Let me state that much.”

Beatrice: “Whatever, I suppose. If you’re going to apologize, do it the others, in fact.”

Roswaal gave Beatrice’s curt statement a nod. Still seated on the ground, he looked up at the coffin. And,

Roswaal: “Beatrice. What follows is a discussion only between you and me.”

Beatrice: “———”

Roswaal’s lowered voice made Beatrice narrow her eyes.

Beatrice crossed her arms and jerked her chin as if saying, “Well, we’ll see what you have to say”. Roswaal placed his hand on the coffin as he pulled himself to his feet, and gazed at Echidna.

His odd-colored eyes teemed with maniacal passion—

Roswaal: “—If it were possible to truly reunite with Teacher again, would you cooperate with me?”



Illustration from Volume 15, coloring by Setowi ([source](#))

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Subaru: “Man, they are really not coming out. I know they have a bunch of stuff to talk about, but isn’t this a bit much?”

Impatient with the stale situation, Subaru pouted as he waited in the clearing.

He had already created ten more snowmen. There were now thirty sculptures of Puck making various expressions, transfixing Emilia and Sanctuary’s residents.

And Ram, who had quite enviably been borrowing Emilia’s lap for the past while, had recovered considerably and now leaned easily against the stone steps. But since her gaze kept shifting toward the Tomb, it was clear that she was worried about what was going on inside.

Beatrice’s eyes had been opened, and Roswaal had backed down.

Subaru doubted that anything violent would happen, but he did understand Ram’s concerns. They had yet to hear Roswaal say for himself that he had calmed down after his fit. But they were assuming that he was not okay.

Subaru: “Well, I’m leaving just that to Beako.”

Beatrice had known Roswaal for even longer than Ram had. And Beatrice had been the one to tell them that the female corpse in the Tomb was Echidna’s.

It was best that the two talk alone, if they were going to be doing that in the corpse’s presence. Subaru could get involved on the topic of what they were planning on doing with Echidna’s corpse afterwards. No problemo.

Subaru: “And it will be easier to talk about our future course after we meet up with Garfiel and the others.”

If they had managed to escape the mansion safely, then they should be coming straight to Sanctuary. Subaru had asked the Men’s Brigade to drive their carriage back to Arlam Village, too. They should meet up with everyone by the following night, at the latest.

They needed to deal with the snow covering Sanctuary and assess damages. Considering how long that would take, having this free time was the best for them. And also, for the sake of their nerves.

By focusing on making snowmen, Subaru had managed to more or less calm down his emotions. He should be capable to hold a peaceful conversation with Roswaal.

He was capable. Yes, he was capable. He rather considered himself capable.

Emilia: "Good work, Subaru... Why are flailing your arms around?"

Subaru: "Ah, I mean, nothing? I'm not shadowboxing as practice to beat that fucker's face in! He'll probably get me first anyway!"

Emilia: "Really?"

Emilia arrived beside him, tilting her head, and looking confused. She looked cheerfully over the rows of snow sculptures.

Emilia: "There's a whole mountain of Pucks. I know he'd be happy to see this."

Subaru: "Would he? I'm imagining him complaining like, «But I thought I was prettier than that?»"

Emilia: "Oh, that did sound like him. Puck, are... Ah, he's sleeping right now."

Muttered Emilia as she withdrew a blue crystal from her breast pocket.

The jewel had settled down into a state where it glowed a deep blue, reflecting the sunlight on the snow as Emilia held it. Puck, devoid of any Contract with Emilia, was sealed inside this crystal.

Subaru: "But you can't summon him like you could before."

Emilia: "No, I can't. This crystal isn't pure enough to seal a Spirit as strong as Puck. He's staying inactive so that the crystal doesn't break, but... I don't think I can touch him or talk to him like this..."

Subaru: "Gotta get a better gemstone. Something like the old green one."

The crystal pendant that used to hang from Emilia's neck. It had shattered into pieces after the end of Puck's Contract, and apparently had been quite a rare stone. Puck apparently had it with him when he first contracted her, so not even Emilia knew where to acquire one.

Emilia: "But I'll definitely get a good gemstone and bring Puck back someday. Then... There are so many things I want to talk about with him. There's everything he kept quiet from me, and everything I discovered because of it."

Emilia lovingly stroked the gem's face, her amethyst eyes full of determination.

She looked so stunningly beautiful that Subaru had to swallow his breath. Emilia noticed this and glanced up at him with a questioning hum, to which Subaru rubbed his nose.

Subaru: "Er, no, it's sorta... Emilia-tan, you've changed. I mean, you've always been cute, but now it's like you're strong too?"

Emilia: "If I am, then it's thanks to you and everyone else. I'm always only getting things from others. I want to be able to repay everyone soon."

Subaru: "I mean that's the same case here about that part of only ever getting things from others."

Subaru and Emilia both keenly felt their powerlessness.

But that did not mean they were going to lick each other's wounds. Subaru got that impression from Emilia, which he found both heartening and isolating.

He had finally gotten some of the confidence and strength needed for him to support her, and then she dashed so far ahead that she did not even need it. It felt like he could run after her forever, and he would never catch up.

Emilia: "By the way, Subaru... So, um."

Subaru: "Mhm?"

Emilia: "They're taking a long time in the Tomb. Mhm, it sure is long."

As Subaru submerged himself in sentimentality, Emilia awkwardly called to him. She glanced over to the Tomb, which sat there the same as ever.

But Emilia's face was steadily changing color. Her cheeks grew flushed, and seeing how the intense blush reached to the tips of her pointed ears, Subaru began panicking.

Subaru: "E—Emilia-tan!? Your face is flashing to red so fast, I mean, are you okay!?"

Emilia: "I... I'm, okay. I am absolutely composed. Now I would, um, like to discuss a certain matter."

Subaru: "I, I'm, indeed."

For some reason, having Emilia speak politely made Subaru wind up doing the same.

Emilia glanced over the area, and once she confirmed that no one was nearby, she gazed red-faced at Subaru. More specifically, she gazed at Subaru's mouth.

Emilia: "So, um... Subaru, it's like, you said that you l-love me, right?"

Subaru: "Erm, um, yes. I did say that. I love you."

Emilia: "—Well, that, erm, makes me, reeeally, reeeally happy, but..."

The way that Emilia's sentence trailed off gave Subaru a bad feeling.

She had just said "That makes me happy, but...". Subaru could think of only one thing that could follow on from this.

This sentence totally followed the flow of "Let's just be friends".

Subaru: "I did mention this before, that I'm waiting for you to notice me, and I'll put in my best effort so that you do."

Emilia: "I'm... That, makes me very happy. But, even when you say these things to me, I don't really understand what it is to like someone like that."

Subaru: "..."

Emilia: “It was the same in the carriage, and it’s the same now in the Tomb. You’re telling me you love me, but I still have nothing I can tell you. I know it’s reeally awful of me...”

Hearing her sentence reach its feeble end, Subaru put his hand to his chest in relief. Emilia’s answer was still in standby mode, then. Nothing had changed from before, which was fine.

So long as Subaru’s repeated and persistent love confessions had not sickened her, everything was fine. Subaru would offer Emilia his hand without fail, if she got lost enough to need it. That was the slight discord between Subaru and Emilia’s recognition of the other’s feelings. Which would become utterly pointless with Emilia’s next statement.

Emilia: “But! I think that we really need to talk about the baby in my tummy!”

Subaru: “———”

Subaru: “—”

Subaru: “———”

Subaru: “—————”

Subaru: “Pardon me?”

Emilia: “I don’t know if they’re a boy or a girl yet, but either way we have to shower them in love! But I was never taught about that, so I don’t know what to do... You have to talk to the dad for these things.”

Subaru: “No, no, no no, no... wait, wait, wait...”

Subaru’s mind could not catch up to Emilia as she rapidly continued. The speed of Emilia’s speech had put her out of breath too, and Subaru could see that she was agitated. There was no way that the two of them could have a proper discussion like this.

Subaru: “Emilia-tan, take deep breaths, and calm down a second. I’m doing that, right now, taking deep breaths to calm down. Oh hey, there’s some snow right here.”

Subaru squatted down, got a handful of snow, and smacked it onto his face to physically cool himself down. He heard Emilia breathing deeply as he forced himself to think rationally.

The baby in Emilia's tummy. Emilia was the mom, and Subaru was the dad. He did not get it. Subaru's coming of age had yet to happen still.

Subaru: "Emilia-tan. When you say baby, you mean like a child, right?"

Emilia: "E—exactly. I know it'll be tough with the Royal Selection, but... That's not the baby's fault, and we have to make sure they're happy! I want the baby to get the love it needs from the people who must love it."

Emilia's determination was noble and beautiful.

But what she was saying did not make sense. Subaru had never done anything like that with Emilia. Which meant that Emilia and someone else had— No, he would rather not think about that.

Subaru: "Emilia-tan... you know that babies don't come from storks or cabbage patches, right?"

Emilia: "But when a boy and a girl kiss that makes a baby."

Subaru: "——"

He was stunned.

At her ignorance, and how adorable she was for thinking this.

Emilia: "Subaru? What's wrong? Hey, Subaru!"

Emilia did not seem like she understood anything at all as she called Subaru's name.

It somehow looked like her expression had grown stronger thanks to motherly self-awareness. Perhaps that was why Emilia had seemed strong to him. Which meant that maybe he should not fix this misunderstanding...

—No. He must. This was not the time for him to be thinking this stuff. If Emilia kept on this course, everything was going to continue alongside Emilia's fake pregnancy. She would be imagining her stomach growing bigger by the day and talking to it. Which was cute, but presented its own problems.

Emilia: "Subaru, maybe, you regret kissing me...?"

Subaru: “Uh no actually I’m craving your infinite kisses!?”

Emilia: “A—are you now...?”

Subaru regretted his knee-jerk response as the conversation flowed deeper into a swamp of misunderstandings. Subaru had basically just told Emilia that he was craving infinite baby-making. And he was, but that came later.

The first step was that Emilia needed to be educated properly. But how come Subaru had to be the one to do it?

Subaru: “C—curse you, Puck!”

Subaru cursed the cat Spirit sleeping deep in the crystal.

In his mind, he saw the cat put its paw to his head, stick out its tongue, and say “Whoops!”.

—After his internal conflict ended, Subaru realized that he had to have Ram or Frederica do the explaining, while Emilia started asking him about deciding on names for the child.

Arc 4 Interlude II - Emilia Camp • Warlock • Spirit • Spiritual Arts User

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 15, Closing Chapter “Meeting Each Other Halfway”, Parts 4-6, and Volume 15, Ending Chapter “Offbeat Steps Under the Moonlight”, Part 2

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by SummaryAnon – [Complete](#), Page 334

Bones creaked at the moment of impact, the body whirling through the air before slamming into the wall. Unfaltering, the shock pierced through the flimsy woodwork, splinters showering the figure as it shot out of building. It skidded gracelessly over the snow, kicking up frost as it tumbled.

???: “———”

The prone figure did not even twitch. Everything fell so silent that it could practically be dead. Subaru glanced at the person who had been shunted through the wall, and at the one who had shunted him, inside the building. The assailant noticed Subaru’s gaze, and with a satisfied sigh,

???: “Yeh... I goddamn got it done, oy.”

Said the blond boy who smiled as he clicked his sharp fangs— Garfiel.

Subaru scratched his head, watching Ram run over to the pummeled Roswaal.

Subaru: “Y—you sure did”.

That was all he managed to say.

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Garfiel and the others met up with Subaru's group in Sanctuary half a day after Emilia's declaration of pregnancy. Otherwise said, they arrived on the morning after the Great Rabbit fight.

Patrasche came to Sanctuary pulling a carriage of six people, including Garfiel.

Hearing that the girls they had gone to rescue in the mansion, Rem, Petra, and Frederica were all okay, and that the rescuers Garfiel and Otto were fine too, relieved Subaru.

But the bonus that they had brought along with them was,

???: "Oh look, hi there again, Mister."

Said a girl with pigtails, bound in a corner of the carriage— Meili, the Beastmaster who had attacked the mansion with Elsa.

The unexpected reunion struck Subaru dumb. Meili addressed him with the same friendly tone and demeanor she had before, in the mansion.

Meili: "Care to hear me out? This blond guy has just no clue how to treat ladies. He leaves them sitting there wrapped up in bindings, it's so awwwfulll. Don't you think so, Mister?"

Subaru: "Yeah. Though I don't know what you would've done to me, so I would've gagged you too... Which means we caught you, but what about Elsa?"

Meili: "No clue there. But Elsa wouldn't have survived that blaze, would she? So I guess she's dead. Doesn't bother me."

Meili didn't care in the slightest about the death of her supposed compatriot, Elsa. Subaru furrowed his brows.

Subaru: "You sure must be relaxed if you're looking for better captivity conditions. Doubt you're gonna be having a great time. You did some really bad stuff."

Meili: "I know. But I messed up, so it's kinda just like, oh well. And if I go back, Mama would just scold me anyway."

Subaru: “Your mom. I know you mentioned this a few times in the mansion, but that means you have some kind of kingpin. Well, just another thing that will get cleared up by talking to Roswaal.”

Meili: “Give me meals thrice a day with no peppirs¹⁹⁰, okay?”

Meili cheerily turned her back to Subaru, announcing that the conversation was over. They would have to deal with her incarceration later. But either way, she was an important witness to as to what had happened in the Roswaal mansion attack.

It genuinely surprised Subaru that Garfiel had had the smarts to capture her.

Next in order was the safety of Sanctuary and the Arlam villagers. After they learned that those who had evacuated Sanctuary earlier were safe in a nearby town, everyone’s well-being was secured. Just when Subaru had put his hand to his chest in relief, the first blow of closure struck.

Garfiel: “Personally think my amazin’ self’s bein’ damn nice to let ya off with just one punch.”

Garfiel swung the arm he had used to punch Roswaal as he gazed at the open hole in the wall. Though Subaru had quite a few objections about Roswaal, and believed that Garfiel’s fury was justified,

Subaru: “Considering that punch is stronger than ten of my punches combined, I really have to wonder about calling it «nice»...”

Garfiel: “Stop bein’ so passive, Captain. C’mon, have a go.”

Garfiel snorted and presented something to Subaru. Subaru looked to Garfiel’s hands, to find him holding a branch he must have gotten in the forest.

It was a rather good branch, thick and long. Like a wooden baseball bat.

Subaru: “What should I do with this, exactly?”

Garfiel: “It’d be a dick move to hit him a bunch. Ya get one shot, but no one got any right to complain if ya use this to make it a good one.”

¹⁹⁰ The ReZero world name for peppers.

Subaru: "It's already enough of a dick move to beat him up after what you did!"

And he was using a weapon. Subaru could start arguing semantics over whether it would count as a punch. But Garfiel just tilted his head, and jerked his chin toward the hole.

Garfiel: "It doesn't look like anyone agrees with'cha, Captain."

Subaru: "Huh?"

Stricken with a rather rueful Garfiel, Subaru looked outside to find that Ram had gotten Roswaal back to his feet, where Frederica faced him with her fist brandished over her head.

Frederica: "Brace yourself, Master!"

Frederica's powerful arm cut through the air as she drove her fist into the same spot Garfiel hit, his left cheek. Roswaal went flying through the air yet again, this time coming to a stop several meters away once he slammed into a tree trunk. The impact made snow fall from the treetop, burying Roswaal beneath it.

After witnessing it to completion, Frederica clapped her hands with a satisfied nod.

Subaru: "Seriously!? Everyone endorses this retaliation?"

Garfiel: "We gotta get closure, Captain. It's gonna be awkward later on if he doesn't get his payback for what he did. Ain't like I ain't gonna heal him. 'N there's Emilia-sama too."

Roswaal poked his head out of the snow, his eyes spinning, as Petra and Otto awaited their turns beside him. Ram pulled Roswaal out, while Emilia stood nearby to heal him at a moment's notice.

Subaru: "I mean Emilia-tan is there as a healer yes? She absolutely isn't waiting for her turn, yes? Though I guess she does have a right to be included."

Garfiel: "Eh, think'd be hard with her personality. But anyway, that's what'cha got. So c'mon, Captain."

Garfiel pushed the wooden bat over to Subaru. He timidly accepted it.

Subaru: "You won't let me in on the talk if I don't hit him?"

Garfiel: “I ain’t goin’ that far. It’s just that you wanna smack the bastard ‘cross the face too, yeh?”

A shove to his back made Subaru step out of the house.

Garfiel shot Subaru a thumbs-up from across the hole in the wall. Looks like he was imitating things Subaru did. With that send-off from his still-uncomfortable surrogate brother, Subaru reached the very end of the Roswaal Closure line.

Incidentally, Petra had just slapped Roswaal’s face with a soaking cloth. A wet, satisfying thwack echoed throughout Sanctuary.

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Subaru: “Ahem, okay. Now that we’ve had our closure, I think it’s time for us to discuss recent events and figure out what we’re doing for the future.”

After clearing his throat, Subaru took charge of the proceedings and glanced over the group. All the important players in this loop were together in the cathedral. Which amounted to quite a number of people, and made Subaru sentimental about how the household had grown.

In the cathedral were the old residents of Roswaal mansion, Subaru, Emilia, Beatrice, Roswaal, and Ram, alongside the new residents of the Roswaal mansion, Otto, Frederica, and Petra. And then there were the main figures from Sanctuary, Garfiel and Ryuzu.

Rem was currently sleeping in Ryuzu’s house, under the care of Pico and the other Ryuzu doubles.

Emilia: “Subaru, your eyes look kind of distant, are you alright? Are you still not feeling well?”

Subaru: “Nope, I’m fine. Just getting sentimental. Team Emilia’s doubled in size. Though, add Sanctuary’s people and the villagers from Arlam, and you’ll start getting a bigger figure.”

Emilia: “...You’re right.”

Emilia nodded, her eyes similarly distant.

After demonstrating her will by holding her ground, and holding the defense lines against the Great Rabbit, the Sanctuary dwellers and Arlam's Young Men Brigade had to view her more favorably. Just because someone had been dependable in a pinch, it did not mean they were fit to be a Ruler, but it was a world of difference compared to when they had been alienating her.

If they could interact with her more often, then they would surely come to learn Emilia's personality. They just needed to gain more understanding like that, over time, thought Subaru.

Subaru: "Aaand, I'm off topic. Okay, back to the point. So, we all know what happened in Sanctuary and at the mansion? Now I'd kinda like to exact some responsibility from the guy who triggered it all, or ask for some details, but..."

Everyone in the room turned to look at the topical mastermind. Roswaal laid limp in a corner of the cathedral, in Ram's lap. His eyes opened as he noticed the gazes upon him.

Roswaal: "Ooooooooooh? After you have all tormented me so thoroughly, you stiiiiiiiiill must brutalize me further before you aaaaaaaaare satisfied?"

Subaru: "You get what you pay for. Emilia-tan even healed you, so stop saying this shameless junk. But anyway, I'm more surprised about Ram."

Ram: "...For what?"

Subaru stuck his tongue out at the mouthy Roswaal, as he redirected the conversation onto Ram. She held Roswaal's hand as she rested his head on her lap, her words making Subaru furrow his brows.

Subaru: "No, I mean, I know you weren't in top shape, but I'm impressed how you just kept quiet and watched the Roswaal Closure. I was certain you'd flip out."

Ram: "Foolishness, Barusu. I do not believe in the least that Roswaal-sama is utterly incapable of mistakes. But I do wish to take his side when his path is mistaken. Of course I would find myself thinking that way. You cannot see even that? How foolish."

Subaru: "Don't start and end by doubling up on the fool business! But, anyway, with that logic, you..."

Ram: “Exactly. You were justified to strike Roswaal-sama. So I accept that he was stricken. It is up to Ram to tend to him with care and kindness afterwards.”

As always, Ram’s exhibitions of love were somewhat masculine.

Nobody could complain about her devotion to Roswaal. Garfiel alone did look like he had presented with a dilemma, but stayed silent, probably because he had always been talked out of mentioning anything.

Beatrice: “You have odd tastes, I suppose. After all those burns to your stomach... Were Betty and the silver-hair girl not around, you would have been left with those scars, in fact.”

The next one to speak was Beatrice, who sat quietly beside Subaru.

Her knees were folded up to her chest as she leaned against Subaru’s left shoulder. She had assisted Emilia in Ram’s treatment, erasing the injuries, allowing Ram to recover so well.

Ram: “I give you my gratitude, Beatrice-sama and Emilia-sama. But I would prefer that saving my life does not act as a pretext for you to meddle with my love affairs.”

Beatrice: “Betty is not as generous as to do that, I suppose. If you are going to devote yourself to this man who had done so much wrong even if it hurts you again, do that at your liberty, in fact.”

Roswaal: “—It won’t happen again.”

Beatrice gave Ram her harsh reply, when Roswaal heard her and sat up. The two of them caught their breath, and Subaru also gulped.

Roswaal was not wearing his cosmetics, exposing his unadorned face.

Without his clown make up, the handsome man covered his left eye with his hand, and gazed over the people assembled in the cathedral with his blue. He bowed his head deeply.

Roswaal: “I will never strive to achieve anything by so arrogantly making sacrifices of the people here ever again— I swear it on the soul of my mentor.”

Everyone: “———”

Roswaal: “And I would rather have Beatrice not punch me a third time.”

Roswaal joked as he raised his head and looked at Beatrice. Beatrice averted her gaze, sour.

Beatrice: “The second one was punishment for your moronic drivel, I suppose. The third is beyond me, in fact.”

Roswaal: “That is how I’d like it to stay. I’d prefer to avoid undergoing any more revenge from you all. Garfiel and Subaru-kun were so ruthless that even I had prepared myself for death.”

Subaru: “You’re putting my hit in the same class as that? It couldn’t have been that strong.”

Though Subaru had wanted his punch to have some oomph. His strike had cleanly struck the tip of Roswaal’s chin, and what a sight it had been to see Roswaal too dizzied to stand.

Either way. Roswaal’s statements did feel genuine. Meaning that Subaru was unhesitant to try trusting him. It seemed that something had moved Roswaal as he watched Ram risk her life to burn his Gospel, contributing to his change of heart.

Subaru: “Though this is kinda out-of-tune from you, considering we diverged from that Gospel you loved. I was seriously thinking that winning you over while you have a breakdown would be the last job to do in Sanctuary.”

Roswaal: “That bud was plucked before it could sprout. No words of mine can change that I lost our bet. At the moment that I lost myself, and defied both my Contract and Gospel toooooooo bring snowfall. And yet you performed so excellently.”

Subaru: “...Well, that’s because Garfiel and Emilia-tan put in serious work.”

Roswaal: “You have a bad habit of neglecting to name yourself at moments like this. Either way, results are results. You have overcome every tribulation that I thought impossible, and liberated Sanctuary. I have lost.”

Garfiel: “—So hey, Captain.”

Roswaal shrugged with resigned acceptance. Subaru found no words to speak, when Garfiel raised his hand, butting in.

His glare remained fixed on Roswaal, while his sharp fangs clattered.

Garfiel: “Are ya seriously thinkin’ t’add this guy t’our team? Honestly, I still ain’t quite agreein’ with that.”

Subaru: “Garfiel...”

Garfiel: “Well, it’s natural ain’t it! What the hell was this prick thinkin’ he was doin’ in Sanctuary and the mansion? Sayin’ you weren’t there Captain, the village’d be rabbit food, ‘n my Sis ‘n this girl’d be killed for fun by that guts lady! If we protect this guy, we don’t know when he’s gonna go back to slicing our necks!”

Garfiel stomped the floor, yelling, a slight quake running through the cathedral.

Garfiel was correct. They had had their conversations and beat-downs with Roswaal to bring closure, but that had only been the preamble for hearing his explanations.

Roswaal had exposed everyone here to mortal danger for the sake of his own goals, and Subaru had seen everyone lose their lives multiple times. This world devoid of sacrifices, where everyone was together and safe, had only been accomplished because he had those deaths as a groundwork as he worked together with everyone.

Subaru was furious enough that he wanted to slap Roswaal, and interrogate him. He wanted to do what Garfiel was saying, and turn his back on Roswaal.

Subaru: “But still, we need Roswaal.”

Garfiel: “Captain!”

Subaru: “We absolutely need Roswaal’s help so that Emilia wins the Royal Selection. She loses this guy as her supporter, and Emilia’s out of the running. We will make him pay, of course... But we can’t just say «okay goodbye now»!”

Garfiel: “Yer really fuckin’ tellin’ me to forgive a guy who tried to kill my family!?”

Subaru: “———”

Garfiel's emotional words pierced Subaru.

No matter how much Subaru tried to pacify him with words, Garfiel would not agree. He had almost lost Frederica, and almost lost Ryuzu. This boy had spent over ten years training himself so that he could protect his family. Roswaal was his unforgivable nemesis.

Frederica: "I... forgive the Master."

Garfiel: "...Sis!?"

But the one to disagree with Garfiel was his very own blood relative, Frederica, who had almost been murdered. Her long, blonde hair swayed as she spoke. Garfiel's eyes shot open in shock.

Garfiel: "What the fuck're you sayin'! This shithead tried to..."

Frederica: "And despite that, I am still alive. Because you saved me, Garf."

Garfiel: "Yer talkin' from fuckin' hindsight! He tried! To kill you! And Nanna! And ain't that... ain't that all there is to it!"

Frederica: "...The Master has cared for me for over a decade."

Garfiel's shoulders heaved as Frederica narrowed her eyes. Her gaze inspired compassion, as she was perhaps moved by her matured brother's anger.

Frederica: "So that I could achieve my goals, I accepted the hand that the Master offered me. I have learned much over the time since, and now I am here. To speak in common terms, I have exploited the Master's generosity for my own purposes. Would our debts not be even?"

Garfiel: "Don't fuckin' treat debts on the same level as life! You don't know when he'll betray—"

Otto: "Erm, I apologize for this when you're so enthusiastic, but would you mind if I interjected?"

Garfiel tried to argue, but this time Otto pulled the breaks.

Garfiel's furious gaze turned to Otto, his hand raised. But Otto let the glare wash off him as he soothingly continued,

Otto: “Now just calm down, calm down.”

Otto: “We’ll put aside Garfiel’s emotional argument for a moment, and consider Margrave Roswaal’s likelihood of committing something like this again... I think we’re safe to believe that he won’t, at least for the time being.”

Garfiel: “Eh? The fuck yer sayin’, ya prick. Are ya sleepin’? I’ll put yer lights out, oy.”

Otto: “The Contract, remember? A Contract was bound between Natsuki-san and the Margrave, so this affair has reached an obvious conclusion. Correct, Margrave?”

Otto was entirely calm as he dealt with a seething Garfiel.

It was also bold of him to verify the state of the Contract not with Subaru, but with Roswaal. The latter realized Otto’s intentions, his eyes widening somewhat.

Roswaal: “Otto-kun iiiiiiiiiiiis correct. Owing to the Contract between myself and Subaru-kun, I cannot defy Subaru-kun’s course.”

Garfiel: “Course, as in?”

Subaru: “He abandons the Gospel and helps make Emilia Ruler. That’s the Contract between me and Roswaal. He can’t pull this crap anymore.”

Subaru took over, Garfiel grinding his teeth in anger.

Subaru had won the bet. Roswaal was bound by the Contract, preventing him from forcing the future to follow the writ of the missing Gospel.

Though whether that rendered Roswaal harmless was a different question altogether.

Garfiel: “That still doesn’t close the books on what he did! If we settle this with an «I’m so sorry I won’t do it again», we ain’t ever getting’ «Rogos’s revenge demands more than one hand»!”

Garfiel’s shouting emphasized his stance even further, creating a divide of opinion among the group regarding Roswaal’s deeds.

Subaru, Otto, and Frederica accepted them. Garfiel and Petra rejected them.

Emilia and Ryuzu were undecided.

Subaru would need to wait and watch to see what stance Beatrice and Ram would side with. Their relationships with Roswaal differed from everyone else's.

Subaru: "Petra..."

Like Garfiel, Petra was adamantly furious at Roswaal. She gripped her skirt, her face red as Subaru called her.

Petra: "I'm still against it no matter what you say, Subaru-sama... The Master tried... Our Lord tried to do something terrible to the villagers, right? Even though everyone trusted him. Even though I thought our Lord was a good person...!"

Roswaal: "...It does hurt tooooooo hear that."

Even Roswaal had to frown as a little girl denounced him.

Petra was probably the one best reflecting the general feelings of the populace, without any ulterior inter-faction motives or complicated circumstances. Not because she was a child. But because her attitude clearly spoke of the rage she was feeling toward Roswaal for betraying her honest opinion of him as her Lord.

The villagers of Arlam and Sanctuary had not been informed that Roswaal had been behind this whole mess.

Petra was present at this meeting as a sort of representative because, despite hearing bits and pieces of conversation in the mansion which had led her near the truth, she never had spoken up to secure absolute conviction. They were trusting in that cleverness of hers.

If Petra had tried to thoughtlessly dig for answers as any child her age would, they might have said some junk to deceive her. But they did not.

Subaru: "I know I'm repeating myself, but we need Roswaal. If we drop Roswaal here, we close Emilia's path. You can say you don't want to work with him, or conversely we could bind him in ropes to get him to, either way he's working with us."

Garfiel: "We ain't gonna convince each other, Captain."

Subaru: "We're not. So we need to find a compromise. What do you want Roswaal to do that will satisfy you for now? And apologies, but we can't have you kill him."

Garfiel: "—Tch."

To keep Garfiel in check as he started getting to his feet, Beatrice stood up. Short as she was, it was more than enough to look down at the boy sitting down.

Garfiel clicked his tongue and shifted his glare to Roswaal—

Garfiel: "First is securing what's needed for the gramps 'n grans in Sanctuary. Yer gonna make sure everyone's safe, no matter if they're stayin' or goin'. It's the first concrete step t'achieving what Sis's trying to do."

Roswaal: "Very well, accepted."

Garfiel: "I ain't gonna be hearin' any excuses 'bout not havin' the funds 'cause the mansion burned down."

Roswaal: "The building that burned down was an auxiliary residence of the Mathers. The main residency is elsewhere. I try not to be so grossly unprepared as to fall into something as ridiculous as bankruptcy."

Roswaal's confident reply shocked Subaru.

It was news to him that the incinerated mansion was a side residence. Now he looked stupid for worrying about where they would live now.

Garfiel: "N' following from that condition, two more promis... No, a Contact."

Roswaal: "———"

Garfiel raised two fingers, Roswaal falling silent.

Garfiel lowered one finger.

Garfiel: “First’s what the Captain said. You pledge t’everyone here that you’ll stick to those terms. You ain’t pullin’ any more of this shit.”

Roswaal: “...Yes, of course. And the other?”

Garfiel: “Easy— You break that, and my amazin’ fangs’ll mash your head to pieces.”

Frigid bloodlust emanated from Garfiel.

The murderousness that should be spearing only into Roswaal was so intense that its ripples brushed against everyone’s skin like a razorblade.

Roswaal: “Very well— Let us tie the Contract.”

So when Roswaal accepted it only a few seconds later, and Subaru felt the bloodlust dissipate like an ebbing wave, his body relaxed, he breathed a sigh.

Garfiel sat cross-legged with his elbow on his knee and hand on his chin, looking unsatisfied.

Garfiel: “...It’s all I got for the moment. You best leave it there too, miss.”

Petra: “But...”

Garfiel: “It ain’t gonna make yer friends or family happy if ya tell them.”

Petra, bordering on tears, looked up at Frederica beside her. Frederica nodded, and Petra stifled her sobs by pressing her face to Frederica’s chest. It was more than enough to pain anyone’s heart.

Subaru: “Anyway, while we still have questions about how aid for Arlam’s and Sanctuary’s villagers will be secured, and where we’re going now that the mansion’s in ashes, and basically what we’re doing next, is it possible to say that we’ve finished exacting responsibility and we have all had our say on this?”

After waiting for Petra’s sobbing to stop, Subaru summed up everyone’s thoughts.

If nobody objected, then they had completed the first stage of conversations about the Sanctuary and mansion affairs. Now they just needed to discuss the other issues one-by-one—

???: “Excuse me.”

But someone did raise their hand in the silence.

And it was the leader of the group, who had not yet given her opinion on Roswaal, Emilia. Everyone’s gaze focused on her as she looked to Subaru, seeking permission to speak.

Subaru: “Go ahead, Emilia-tan. Feel free to say anything.”

Emilia: “Then I’ll oblige.”

Emilia nodded at Subaru and looked at Roswaal. Roswaal raised an eyebrow, looking rather surprised as he waited for Emilia to speak.

And Emilia spoke.

Emilia: “Roswaal has not done the most important thing yet. This discussion is not over until he does.”

Roswaal: “Most important thing...?”

Roswaal failed to figure out what Emilia was talking about, looking confused. Subaru tilted his head too as he contemplated what Emilia could be trying to say.

Emilia looked over the group, and with a quiet sigh,

Emilia: “When you do something bad, you have to be sorry about it.”

All: “———”

Emilia: “Everyone’s been telling Roswaal to do this and do that to prove that he’s repented, and Roswaal swore to his Teacher that he won’t do anything bad again, but before we even get to that, isn’t there something he has to say? Roswaal, have you said it even once? I didn’t hear it.”

Her cheeks red with anger, Emilia railed on Roswaal.

She was saying things so juvenile that it left everyone speechless. But Emilia was not joking in the least, and was truly, demonstrably mad.

Emilia was angry. Even though she rarely ever got angry at all. Except it was happening, and Emilia was mad.

To ensure that something so obvious, but something everyone had forgotten, did happen.

Subaru: “Roswaal.”

Subaru looked at the astonished Roswaal, and smiled as he looked to catch him off guard.

Subaru: “Apologize, Roswaal. If we’re going to do things together, then you’re obligated to, as a person.”

Roswaal: “———”

Subaru shared Emilia’s stance, the sentiment spreading to everyone in the cathedral. Roswaal perceived what he sea of gazes sought from him, and swallowed his breath.

Emilia: “—Mhm, that’ll do.”

The way Emilia smiled after seeing Roswaal’s apology left an incredible impression.

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—Subaru makes an indescribable expression as he looked down at the woman in the coffin.

Roswaal: “Whaaaaaaat an impolite face to make whiiiiiiile looking at my Teacher.”

Said Roswaal, as he peered at Subaru from aside.

Inside the deepest room of the Tomb, Subaru and Roswaal faced each other, the coffin between them. So that they could speak, without anyone intruding. But before that,

Subaru: “This is honestly your Teacher, the Witch Echidna?”

Roswaal: “liiiiiindeed. Her body rests eternal in the spellstone, her mortal beauty preserved. It was worth living so I can meet her again like now.”

Subaru: “All I really have to say about your descendant-hopping super-motivated faux-stalking is «euch».”

Roswaal: “Beatrice hit me with the eeeeeeeexact same comment.”

Roswaal seemed to be having fun, but Subaru felt no urge to smile.

Beatrice had told Subaru that Roswaal had been perpetuating his life by transcribing his soul. Subaru had cracked a joke about something similar before, but he had never even dreamed that it would be correct.

But it did cause him to come to terms with the family’s fanaticism for Echidna, since it was all actually just Roswaal.

Subaru: “Do you feel guilty at all about your descendants...? I guess the answer’s obvious.”

Roswaal: “The Mathers family was made for that purpose. I began it, I continued it, I constructed it. It does not discomfort me, no matter who criticizes me.”

Subaru: “Great, the quintessential stalker.”

Roswaal: “Surely not. Regardless, there’s something I’d like toooooo confirm. About this person you saw in the Trial, who is not my Teacher called Echidna.”

Roswaal narrowed his eyes as he spoke. Subaru narrowed his eyes as well.

There were differences between the Echidna that Roswaal was talking about, and the Echidna that Subaru had met in the dream castle. That was the shock Subaru got once he got a glimpse of the woman in the coffin.

Subaru looked down at her figure once again. Long white hair and pale skin. Beautiful features, and a sleek black dress. Her distinctive characteristics were identical to Echidna’s. But she was obviously someone else.

The Echidna that Subaru knew was slightly younger than the woman in the coffin. Her features tended to be cute rather than beautiful, and her hair was cut shorter than the woman’s.

They did look alike. If someone called them sisters, Subaru would believe it. However,

Roswaal: “My Teacher had no relatives. She had no elder sister, and no one to call a daughter except Beatrice. I know this better than anyone else.”

Subaru: “So, who was the Echidna in the Trial? It was her, but with her youth restored... That is not what it feels like either. They’re different people. I can tell that this isn’t just a thing about ages.”

Roswaal: “Anyone intruding on the Trial must be connected. If this person was the one managing the Trial, they are assuredly connected. Perhaps some external party acted while I was unaware... It is conceivable. But.”

Roswaal did not continue, but Subaru sensed that he had dismissed whatever he was going to say as impossible. He did not have any basis for it, but perhaps Roswaal was confident in his stalking proficiency. His confidence told him it was impossible that someone could do something bad to his Teacher without him knowing about it. Which was gross.

Roswaal: “I feel that you’re imagining something rather iiiiiiiimpolite.”

Subaru: “Blame your imagination, or actually just blame yourself. Anyway, both me and Emilia saw Echidna during the Trial. Or at least, an Echidna that isn’t this one.”

Emilia had been present when Subaru first laid eyes on the woman in the coffin. That had been when they realized that the woman Beatrice called Mother was not the person they called Echidna.

Who was the girl in the dream? Without ever reaching any conclusions, Subaru wound up engaging in this conversation with Roswaal.

Subaru: “Can’t we use the Trial’s systems to enter the dream again?”

Roswaal: “The Tomb’s functions were ceased by a destruction of the algorithm. The technique has been lost, and the requirements are complex. And the Miasma permeating this Tomb has escaped. This Tomb is just an ordinary, historical stone structure now.”

Subaru: “I, see...”

Disappointment that he could not confirm it, and disappointment that he could not see her again, assaulted Subaru simultaneously. Just for some reason, Subaru did not find interacting with her and the Witches so bad, even factoring in the whole betrayal thing.

So losing the opportunity to do so brought melancholy in Subaru.

Subaru: "...We'll put the unchangeable stuff off for later. So, what are you thinking to do with the woman in the coffin? Bury her?"

Roswaal: "I will neither bury nor burn her. Subaru-kun, I'd like you not to misunderstand. I desire reunion with my Teacher, but that does not mean I've been yearning tooooooo meet my Teacher's cadaver. This is merely one step along the way."

Subaru: "What do you mean?"

Subaru raised his brows, wariness and distrust swelling within him.

Subaru had thought that Roswaal's desired reunion with his crush was a face-to-face meeting with the corpse in this Tomb. He had not conceived the possibility that her corpse was actually in the Tomb until he learned that as a fact, but the second that Subaru found out that Roswaal's mentor was inside here, of course he arrived at that possibility.

But Roswaal easily rejected that idea.

Roswaal: "I desire to speak again with my Teacher, blood running through her, soul housed inside her, life breathed within her. Retrieving her corpse is simply the first step."

Subaru: "You are going to resurrect the dead!? That... This world has magic to bring back the dead!?"

Roswaal: "Make sure you do not misunderstand. The possibility is present because it is her. There is no way to bring back lives that have met a conventional death. Od Lagna would never permit such convenient magic as resurrection."

Subaru: "Od Lagna?"

Subaru scrunched his face at the new word.

Roswaal: “Od Lagna is... How to say, a stockpile of Mana at the core of the world. No, supposing that the world itself were a living creature, then Od Lagna would be its nexus, and the Od of the world. Though we can only imagine as to its exact location, and whether it is sentient or not.”

Subaru: “The Od of the world... wouldn’t permit it, meaning?”

Roswaal: “To explain that would require quick unravelling of the entire history of magic to this day.”

Subaru: “In three sentences.”

Roswaal: “How harsh.”

Roswaal stroked his chin as he considered what to say. Then he began explaining as coherently and succinctly as he could.

Roswaal: “All of magic in this world was devised by past magicians. The first incidence of magic happened when an individual with outstanding talent in the manipulation of Mana began casting magic of their type. As more people became capable of magic, and disparities in proficiency began to arise, it became difficult to classify the phenomenon without assigning names or classes.”

Subaru: “That was when magic first got names, and was split into the separate type affinities.”

Roswaal: “Yes. While magical techniques and knowledge were expanding, people with incredible talent for magic started being born. They devised novel uses of Mana, separated from the existing forms of magic, to create new magic. The development of magic has always proceeded as mundane magicians comprehensively overuse the novel discoveries from a prior selection of geniuses.”

Subaru: “Kind of a spiteful lecture, since you’re one of the geniuses.”

Roswaal: “I may have gone through unpleasant times, oooooonce or twice.”

In every world and universe out there, the overly proficient ones would be alienated. There had been a time when Roswaal had been immature, and suffered under those gazes and obstacles. Though nowadays, he would definitely smile back and secretly get revenge.

Subaru: “So what does this have to do with Od Lagna?”

Roswaal: “The existence of a source for magic and the power called Mana. Research investigating into the topic proceeded as people tested unprecedented approaches and methods for using Mana. Those who created magic with shocking effects began to stand out even among the geniuses. Each case of this magic produced results beyond compare to previous magic, such that a single magician could alter a region’s geography— And once that happened, they all saw exactly the same thing.”

Subaru: “...”

Roswaal: “With its dim glow, it was the very Mana they so naturally manipulated. But this was a mass of power overwhelmingly vaster than any Mana they had touched before— These magicians, with their understanding of so-called forbidden magic, all witnessed this expanse of Mana, and their minds soon fell ill.”

Subaru: “And that was Od Lagna... The fountain of the world?”

Roswaal: “Just as humans fear injury or disease, the world rejects those liable to shake its foundations. That was what some first started saying about Od Lagna. The true common point between those whose minds were broken by witnessing Od Lagna, was that they reached new heights of magic that would have rewritten the practice’s history.”

It was unclear how powerful their magic had been.

They had divulged some portion of the theory behind their magic, but before they could publicly exhibit the completed algorithm and have it adopted for use, the magician who invented it would invariably have their mind broken.

Subaru: “Then resurrection would be one of them?”

Roswaal: “I wish to see my dearly departed again. That desire is omnipresent, shared by everyone, and more than a few geniuses were motivated by it. Though, before they could reach anyone, they all lost their minds to Od Lagna.”

Subaru thought it ironic. It wasn’t clear whether Od Lagna truly existed, or that Od Lagna had destroyed the magicians’ minds. But still, they sought to find the limit of their abilities. To realize a goal that everyone would yearn for.

Roswaal: “One theory states that Od Lagna is the consciousness ruling over everything in the world. And though it warrants skepticism, perhaps Od Lagna could be the one bestowing people with Divine Protections— Is the nonsense that people have come up with.”

Subaru: “Trying to stay uninvolved, and then involving itself... That celestial bunch never make sense, no matter where you are.”

Roswaal: “«That celestial bunch» is an entertaining way to put it.”

Ignorant to the logic behind Subaru’s epithet as he treated Od Lagna as a god, Roswaal laughed. Subaru had not expected this discussion, but their real topic had been something other than Od Lagna.

Subaru brought the conversation back to,

Subaru: “So, your reunion with your Teacher will not enrage Od Lagna.”

Roswaal: “Eeeeeeeexactly. It does not make use of any forbidden arts, or any special powers or algorithms. In fact, I’m far more worried that you would be the one displeasing Od Lagna.”

Subaru: “...Honestly, I was thinking the same.”

Return by Death. Subaru did not intend to reveal its requirements to Roswaal in detail, but it was no exaggeration that Subaru’s ability was conceivably touching on the taboo of resurrection. Subaru had used Return by Death to alter his own doomed fate, and saved the lives of others. If Od Lagna were to witness this, there was no way that Subaru would pass its harsh standards.

Unless, perhaps, the entity that allowed Subaru to Return by Death was strong enough to survive Od Lagna.

Subaru: “Just the idea makes me shudder. Anyway, your methods for this are...?”

Roswaal: “Sorry, but I’m not going to tell you that now.”

Subaru shook his head and got back to talking, when Roswaal slammed that statement into him. Subaru’s eyes darted about in confusion for a moment as he failed to understand what was said.

Subaru: “Huh, wha, what? What did you say?”

Roswaal: “Whaaaaaaat you just heard. I’m not going to tell you my methods for achieving my ultimate goal. I’m rather sure that nothing in the terms of our Contract reeeeeeequires me to.”

Subaru: “I mean, yeah, but... Come on!”

Roswaal: “I want to make this clear to you, Subaru-kun.”

Said Roswaal coldly. He walked around the coffin to come to Subaru’s side, looking down at him as he raised his finger.

Roswaal: “I have lost my guide the Gospel, and lost sight of the path of how things should be. But that will not make me abandon my goals in the least. Our Contract prevents me from using my past approach. And even supposing I laid pointless obstacles before you, Garfiel would rip my throat open, so I am also barred from that.”

Subaru: “...Yeah, exactly. So what can you do? What path can you pick except one where you reveal your goal, and come to us for help?”

Roswaal: “That is simple—— I will oversee you.”

Subaru: “———”

Oversee. Definitely, it was not a peaceful word, and it rendered Subaru speechless. Though Roswaal’s eyes gleamed in different colors as he looked down at Subaru, identical emotion lit them up.

Roswaal: “Fortunately, your goal of making Emilia-sama the Ruler overlaps with my path to achieving my goal. You were supposed to secure an unshakable will of iron at this juncture, devoting yourself to Emilia-sama no matter the loss, and become a Knight riddled in wounds.”

Subaru: “...”

Roswaal: “But that route has been cut off. You instead chose to walk a more painful, more agonizing path of thorns. Though I do respect you for that decision, I also pity you.”

Subaru: “Excuse me?”

He could let that slide. Subaru glared at Roswaal, who shook his head. He was definitely doing so out of pity for Subaru.

He faced his palm to Subaru, who was both irritated and confused.

Roswaal: “This is where you should have learned what it is to lose something. You should have become a Sage, who even in the face of loss, stringently protects only what is precious. I know how it sounds, but I wanted to save you.”

Subaru: “What’s so wise about that. What is so clever about accepting loss¹⁹¹!”

Roswaal: “You have rejected loss and chosen to salvage everything, and you will hurt for it. You will repeatedly suffer wounds beyond repair, repeatedly suffer loss, frantically attempt to regain what you lost, the invisible hurt compounding perpetually. And I pity that.”

Subaru: “—Hk.”

Roswaal: “And so I will not be lenient about your refusal to be a Sage, and decision to be a Fool. As expected, yes? After all, you are the one who chose this.”

Roswaal’s outstretched hand landed on Subaru’s shoulder, the latter unable to speak.

Subaru trembled as Roswaal drew his face near to Subaru’s, and whispered softly in his ear.

Roswaal: “—Should you lose anyone you have resolved to protect, I will swiftly incinerate the survivors.”

Subaru: “...!?”

Roswaal: “You have chosen to save everything. You must not miscarry a single thing. A world of loss must not lead to the future. As a future where you accept loss could lead to a future I do not desire, I will invalidate it— Now that the Gospel is gone, you are what guides me to my goal, Subaru-kun. Only you, and your path.”

¹⁹¹ A bit of a not-so-funny pun. The word Sage is composed of the Kanji “賢”, meaning “wise”, and “人”, meaning “man”.

Roswaal drew his face away and lightly shoved Subaru's chest. It was not particularly strong, but Subaru pitched back as if struck, his breath catching as his back hit the wall.

That man standing in front of Subaru, Roswaal L. Mathers, was terrifying.

His conceptions had changed. He had stopped relying on the Gospel, and would never do anything to antagonize Subaru or Emilia again. He would assist Subaru should the latter desire it, and would put in his all to keep Emilia on the path to the Throne.

But were Subaru to make even the slightest mistake, Roswaal would instantly overturn and ruin everything. No lie and no deception. Roswaal would absolutely do it.

Roswaal: "What, there's no need to be so scared. Provided that you continue to fulfil your roles, I will offer you my utmost assistance— That is the Contract between us."

Subaru: "...Really taught me to be more careful when looking at Contracts."

Roswaal: "Your duty is to ensure that not a single person present today is lost, Subaru-kun. Without ever losing a single person, lead Emilia-sama to the top. Should you achieve that, I will also achieve my goal. I will see my Teacher again."

Subaru weakly hung his head. Roswaal gave a long sigh at him, and nodded. His shoes peeled on the stone as he corrected his posture.

Roswaal: "Upon my name of Margrave Roswaal L. Mathers, once we return to the main estate, I shall appoint you, Natsuki Subaru, as Knight— Our promise will be fulfilled."

Subaru: "..."

Accolade.

Something that Subaru had yearned for, the right to stand at Emilia's side.

After everything else in this conversation, hearing that did not bring as much joy as expected. But after everything Roswaal had said, he would definitely stay to his word. He gained no benefit from not supporting Subaru.

Seeing Subaru silently nod, Roswaal turned to exit the room. He must have meant that the conversation was over.

But his footsteps paused before he could exit, and he turned back.

Roswaal: “Right. I did just tell you that I’d be helping you wholeheartedly, so heeeeeeeere’s another piece of information.”

Subaru: “...What is it?”

Roswaal: “—I hired the Bowel Hunter to kill Beatrice, but both this and the previous attack from the Beastmaster are completely unrelated to me.”

Subaru: “—Huh?”

“What more could there possibly be?”, Subaru thought, his jaw dropping as Roswaal spoke. Unable to comprehend what Roswaal was saying, Subaru remained utterly still as he sought further explanation. Roswaal closed one eye, continuing.

Roswaal: “There’s nothing to add. I was the commissioner for the affair at the Royal Capital, and requested Beatrice’s assassination. But I never asked anyone to kill Frederica nor Petra, and had no time to tell them the particulars. I had been following the Gospel’s writ and so placed the order before the Selection started, you see.”

Subaru: “But, that can’t... I mean, she and Elsa are from the same group! So!”

Roswaal: “Someone other than myself was operating to attack the mansion, iiiiiiiis what it means.”

Subaru: “———”

Roswaal: “Adversity never seems to end, and isn’t there worth in resisting it?”

With that cynical statement, Roswaal’s footsteps steadily grew distant.

The voice echoing through Subaru’s head threw his mind into disarray as he stood, utterly still, his back leaning against the Tomb’s cold wall.

All the issues that had supposedly been resolved still sat smoldering in his chest. Feeling heat from the embers, Subaru clutched his head, and sighed deeply.

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???: “You look depressed, in fact.”

What saved Subaru, brooding as he was, was the astonished voice of a young girl.

Subaru sat there as he saw her dress sway. His gaze traced up the luxurious fabric to find an adorable face looking down at him, arms crossed.

Subaru: “Beako.”

Beatrice: “I don’t know what Roswaal told you, but my Contractor needs to stop making that face, I suppose. It reflects poorly on Betty, in fact.”

Subaru: “That’s a real issue. And I just told you how awesome I’d be. Oh hell, this is pathetic.”

Subaru slapped his cheeks and shook his head.

Beatrice knelt down to reach Subaru’s eye level, before narrowing her eyes.

Beatrice: “It seems that he said some terrible things, I suppose I don’t mind hearing out your whining, in fact. As a temporary, special service, I suppose.”

Subaru: “The mental image of «whining into a little girl’s chest» is the worst, so I’ll give that a pass. If it really is looking bad, then I’ll instantly be there though.”

Beatrice: “Well, if you’re so inclined then I’ll deal with it with you, in fact.”

Beatrice snorted as she got to her feet. Subaru lifted himself up as well.

He turned his hips and looked ahead, gazing at Beatrice’s profile as she stared at the coffin.

Subaru: “That’s your mother, there.”

Beatrice: “And she is not the Echidna that you know, I suppose.”

Neither of them knew what it meant.

But Beatrice was glad that she had gotten to see her mother again, even if as a corpse. If the one sleeping here had been the Echidna that Subaru knew, “disappointment” wouldn’t be enough to describe Beatrice’s or Roswaal’s state. Though Subaru thought it was fine for Roswaal be somewhat anguished, he did not want to see Beatrice in any more sorrow.

After all, Beatrice had already lost one of her desired reunions.

Subaru: “I wonder what happened to Ryuzu Meyer’s crystal.”

Beatrice: “...I don’t know, in fact.”

Murmured Beatrice, leaving Subaru without a clue of what to do.

Echidna’s laboratory rested deep in the woods of Sanctuary. Inside was a system to produce Ryuzu duplicates, and the original Ryuzu Meyer who acted as both nucleus and operations for the barrier around Sanctuary.

A girl named Ryuzu Meyer was sealed in the crystal there, like this woman in the coffin. Or should be.

—Because the Ryuzu Meyer crystal had disappeared.

Beatrice had gone to the facility with Subaru, determined to see her old friend again, and was dumbstruck at the sight. Subaru cursed the fact he had not gone in to check the facility himself beforehand.

A gaped, giant hole had been opened on the floor where the crystal had been, both the supporting base and Ryuzu Meyer’s body absolutely gone.

Subaru had wondered whether they had fallen into the underground beneath the rancid, stinking room, and so asked Emilia to send Micro Spirits down to check— to no avail. Beneath the facility, laid a cavern that led to the forest through an underground passage.

Whoever had taken the crystal knew about the passage’s existence and had been waiting for the barrier to be broken before grabbing the crystal— That was the only theory he could conceive.

The thief's motives were not the issue here, though. The issue was that they had stolen the chance for Beatrice to see her friend again. She may be acting strong, but she had to be worried.

Subaru would get it back someday, and this reunion would occur. He was resolved for it.

Subaru: "Well I can sound as arrogant as I want, but I'm still insignificant by myself."

Subaru rolled his shoulders and stretched his arms, ironically recognizing his own powerlessness. He was primarily relying on Beatrice, but also Emilia and Garfiel for strength.

And for smarts he could depend on Otto, or, as much as he loathed saying it, Roswaal. Everything else was up to Frederica and Petra to support.

As always, Subaru's skill and ability remained feeble and limited.

Beatrice: "Subaru, what are you grinning about, I suppose?"

Subaru: "Just thinking, there are times where you're weak and pathetic, but there's also times where you're not. All I can do is leave it to you."

Beatrice: "It feels that I understand what you're saying, while simultaneously I don't, in fact."

Though she could not discern what Subaru meant, Beatrice smiled, perceiving that he was counting on her. Subaru gave her a nod, prefacing with a "Well yeah",

Subaru: "I'm not expecting you to figure out that much. It would be pathetic if you saw through me. But anyway, man, Spiritual Arts Users are amazing. I have never done magic like that before, got me really fired up."

Beatrice: "...Is that so, I suppose."

Subaru: "Though that was another case of me being completely dependent on you, so I can't go on bragging about it. I mean, I can say I'm a Spiritual Arts User, but it hasn't exactly hit me yet."

His Contract with Beatrice had been consumed by the course of events around the Library's collapse, making it a rather brief affair.

Though he had felt a definite connection back when she called his name and settled herself in his arms, which seemed to be enough.

Beatrice: “Subaru— I have something important to tell you, in fact.”

Subaru: “Hm?”

Beatrice looked serious. Subaru tilted his head, waiting for her to speak.

Beatrice: “Your Contract with Betty means you’re a Spiritual Arts User, but... Betty is very different from most Spirits, in fact. So you would best consider yourself as being slightly different from a genuine Spiritual Arts User, I suppose.”

Subaru: “Well the other Spirits I’m aware of aren’t humanoid, and Puck’s the only one that’s sentient, talking, and moving around. So I know you’re a little different.”

The only other Spiritual Arts Users that Subaru knew were Emilia and Julius.

Emilia was contracted to Puck, and also had a relationship with the Micro Spirits. Julius had multiple Contracts with multiple Quasi Spirits, stronger than Micro Spirits, and should be operating as quite the powerful Spiritual Arts User.

The evil Spirit Petelgeuse was one exception to that pattern— but Subaru would rather not remember him, and so he would be omitted. Exceptions were exceptions, after all.

Beatrice: “Betty is... Well, strictly speaking, Betty and Bubby diverge from the principles of other Spirits, in fact. Mother... the Witch Echidna made us, meaning that we are Artificial Spirits, I suppose. With that said, the method to create a perfect one is technically difficult... While Betty is inestimably powerful compared to ordinary Spirits, I do have some flaws, in fact.”

Subaru: “Flaws...”

Beatrice looked ashamed as Subaru voiced the word. She was prideful, and held incredible respect for her mother. It must hurt her to acknowledge that she had flaws at her most fundamental aspect.

But Beatrice cast that weakness away with a sigh—

Beatrice: “Bubby and Betty each have different flaws, but... one of my flaws is monopolization of my Contractor, I suppose.”

Subaru: “Monopolization of your Contractor?”

Beatrice: “Put simply, merely by being in a Contract with Betty, the Contractor exhausts practically all of their capabilities as a Spiritual Arts User. So... erm, being that you’re in a Contract with me, Subaru, you cannot contract any Spirits except Betty, I suppose. That applies to both Minor and Quasi Spirits, in fact.”

Subaru: “...Okay, got it.”

Grasping Beatrice’s point, Subaru nodded several times.

Preserving a Contract with Beatrice would use so much of Subaru’s resources, that he would have none left to enter a Contract with other Spirits. While Emilia could ask the Micro Spirits, rather than Puck, for their aid, Subaru was unable to do this.

Subaru: “Well that’s kind of a disappointment, but I’ll accept it anyway. There are heaps of benefits to a Contract with you, ignoring the cons. And I’m not going to let go of you to go making Contracts with some dumb Micro Spirits.”

Beatrice: “G—good.”

Hearing that reply, Beatrice’s tense cheeks relaxed somewhat. But she instantly erased that expression, clearing her throat, and,

Beatrice: “Th—there’s still more left, I suppose. Though it’s a very minor thing compared to that other one, in fact. No need to think too hard as you listen, I suppose.”

Subaru: “Okay. Well, I’m drowning in stuff I don’t know here, so please just tell me anything.”

Beatrice: “Erm, so well, Betty is a little, yes, just a little higher grade compared to most Spirits, and, erm... I have poor mileage, in fact.”

Subaru: “Mileage... makes you sound like a car.”

It usually took a lot of MP¹⁹² to use powerful magic or summon creatures in video games. That balance between cost and power was said mileage, but why was Beatrice having such a hard time saying this?

Subaru: “Huh? But even having poor mileage you used tons of magic against the Rabbit, and you let me use magic too, and you weren’t sapping anything from me either right?”

Beatrice: “That was using Mana from the stockpile I had amassed over a long period, I suppose. Had I been taking the Mana I needed for that fight, not even thousands of you would suffice, in fact. You can thank me for that, I suppose.”

Subaru: “W—well sure. I can’t imagine how strained I’d be if I tried doing any of that by myself.”

Consecutive Minyas and that final Al Shamac.

One Shamac was enough to exhaust Subaru’s store. There was no way he could have provided for all of that.

Subaru: “But we cannot keep doing that, can we? I’m your Contractor, so of course I need to supply you with Mana.”

Beatrice: “I’m expecting you to, in fact. Artificial Spirits like Betty and Bubby are made from Od made substance, meaning we do not produce Mana naturally, I suppose. So we need to get Mana from the atmosphere or our Contractor, in fact. And I can only receive my Mana from people, I suppose.”

Subaru: “Okay... Then how were you getting by in the mansion?”

Beatrice: “—I... I was taking bits from everyone there, in fact.”

Beatrice must feel guilty about it, as she looked away as she talked.

She looked embarrassed, and her gaze grew even redder as Subaru stared at her. While Subaru did not quite understand what nuance Mana drains had among Spirits, judging from Beatrice’s reaction, it was apparently not very good manners.

¹⁹² Magic Points.

Subaru: “Anyway, you look like you’re very sorry about it, so I won’t probe into it. So supposing we save the Mana you collect from me for everyday functioning, how much stored Mana do you have left?”

Subaru’s Mana reserves were paltry, and Beatrice consumed lots of Mana. Meaning that they would have to use Beatrice’s powerful magic sparingly, chipping away at her reserved Mana bit-by-bit.

So Subaru had to confirm how much Mana she had remaining.

Beatrice: “—None, I suppose.”

Subaru: “...Hmm?”

Beatrice: “None, in fact. I used everything I stored over those four centuries in that battle, I suppose. The loss of the Forbidden Library also took quite an amount and that final Al Shamac was the killer, in fact. Betty’s Mana reserves are empty, I suppose.”

So, what. That meant...

Beatrice had no Mana stored up.

Subaru’s Mana was barely enough to cover Beatrice’s day-to-day.

Beatrice consumed lots of Mana and did not have the Mana to use her powerful magic. Subaru’s Contract with Beatrice meant that he could not enlist the Micro Spirits for help.

Subaru: “So... Did we just make a team of a Spirit and Spiritual Arts User that can’t use magic!?”

Beatrice: “W—well, I suppose that’s one way you could put it, in fact.”

Subaru: “How else could you put it!? The hell! Are you kidding me, is this seriously happening!?”

Going from the results, what Subaru had achieved by becoming a Spiritual Arts User was the acquisition of a little girl.

Subaru: “Actually, I’m really worried about the future right now!? Are you sure we’ll be okay!?”

Beatrice: “Whoopsie, I suppose.”

Subaru: “It’s not funny!!”

This was the newborn pairing of two people that made up half a Spiritual Arts User. Their arguing echoed, far, far, forever through the Tomb.

Arc 4 Appendix - The Advent

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 15, Addendum “—The Return”

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by SummaryAnon — [Complete](#), Page 358

—Footsteps echoed through the cold, dark chamber.

Not a speck of light beamed into the space, making the path equivalent to a charge through dark or shadow.

But the footsteps sounded without hesitation, travelling through the rancid chamber with a casual gait. With such ease that they may as well be traversing their own room.

???: “———”

Water dripped. Insects squirmed.

Mud and gravel crunched underfoot. This place inspired nothing but discomfort, but the silhouette gave not the slightest murmur of discontent.

Hordes of insects opened a path as they fled from the silhouette, their stronghold disturbed. Water flowed over their feet, the gentle downward slope their guide as they walked on.

Eventually, the silhouette stopped, their long hair flowing behind them as they look up.

As before, there was no light. But their eyes shine with a gleam called conviction.

Dim lights danced as wind whipped around the silhouette’s feet.

Their long, pink hair and long-sleeved robe fluttered in the breeze. At their feet, at the point from which the wind blew, a circle drew itself in the ground.

???: “So the starter algorithm still works.”

With that murmur, the silhouette atop the glowing circle, the girl, levitated.

She ascended as if riding on an invisible floor, rushing for the roof of the dark. That instant, as if ghosting through the bedrock, the girl was launched to the outside.

The sunlight burned her eyes. The girl closed her eyelids.

It took exactly ten seconds for her to open her eyes again. Sunrays pierce through her eyelids and into her eyeballs. Prompted by rebellion, and by some amount of impatience, she kept her eyes open wide.

—What she saw, was the sun rising anew.

Girl: “...It is far less emotional than I expected.”

Faced with the daylight, the girl tilted her head.

Indeed, not a single ripple of emotion arose in her apathetic eyes. After all her time spent under a false sun, she had hoped that seeing the real thing again would move her, but the results were not good.

Girl: “Either way, I have safely left the barrier. Meaning that thing safely defeated the Trial, frustratingly. I will give my thanks for that and no more.”

If that had not happened, it would have been inordinately difficult to leave Sanctuary. She would have caught herself in her own scheme. When she thought back on the girl who had dealt with that mess, she felt something akin to displeasure sprout in her heart.

Girl: “Well, it is of no consequence. I cannot be too reckless in this body, and I might as well walk around for a while to fill in the blanks.”

The girl flexed her hands open and closed, checking her body’s condition.

Duplicates of a progenitor body serving as a vessel, and a subsumed soul of the same nature. She had fit her soul to it and anchored in, but familiarization would take time.

Girl: “He already gave me a name, after all. I think I will call myself Omega.”

She smiled as she trod on the grass, slipping through gaps in the trees to exit the forest.

The journey was somewhat troubling for the young girl's legs, but it was no matter. The fatigue and pain proved her soul and body were connected. She must enjoy the life she had long lost, in abundance.

Omega: "Beatrice has left the Forbidden Library and Roswaal has lost his Gospel. Though considering the man who pocketed the burnt remains, and Garfiel's persistent rage, the fires are still smoldering yet. How will he face what is to come? Perhaps I will watch over him, from the sun and in the shade."

Purposefully excluding the girl that irked her, she started walking.

There was a world she was going towards. What never grew dull for her, abundant, endlessly sating her curiosity, a mountain of treasures for the dead Thirst for Knowledge Incarnate.

Omega: "If I am like this, perhaps I will understand someday."

Along her path, the girl sighted a ring of flowers, and smiled. She plucked a flower petal, sniffed its scent, and popped it in her mouth.

Even beautiful flowers would wilt. Why must the flowers wither?

Were even the beautiful memories shared between people destined to wane?

Omega: "—Ahh, why must love fade?"

Muttering, her long pink hair swaying, the girl stepped forth.

Again, the Witch was unleashed on the world.

One Day II Chapter 1 - The Relationship of These Sisters

Has been cut from the Light Novel Adaptation

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by SummaryAnon — [Complete](#), Page 2

—Everyone subject to the scene would agree that it was unbearable to witness.

Garfiel: “H-hey, Sis. That luggage looks pretty heavy there. Want my amazin’ self to carry some?”

Frederica: “Garf... No, do not worry. I am merely offering some slight assistance, since it discomforts me to be constantly served as a guest. Feel free to relax, Garf.”

Garfiel: “O-oh. W-well, got it. Just call if ya need anythin’, ‘kay?”

Garfiel scratched his cheek, standing stock still as Frederica pushed the trolley. Frederica gazed at him for a moment, but immediately pulled herself together and focused back on her work. The small wheels rolled across the floor, their noise fading further down the mansion’s hallway. In a daze, Garfiel watched his sister grow distant.

Subaru: “...So annoying.”

Garfiel scratched at his short, blond hair, sighed, and walked off in the opposite direction from Frederica. Subaru put his hand to his forehead, having witnessed this scene from around the corner of the hallway, and lamented the irritating exchange.

Emilia: “They’ve had a week to calm down and talk... But they still look reeeally uncomfortable.”

Said Emilia, hidden in the same place and same manner as Subaru. Subaru was squatting while Emilia spied the exchange from above him.

Subaru felt Emilia’s breath grow distant as he stood up and rotated his hips.

Subaru: “It’s a decennary reunion... and one without any contact during the decade. I heard their goodbye wasn’t exactly an invigorating one where they were wishing each other success, and I can understand it being awkward, but...”

Subaru crossed his arms and tilted his head.

He could understand it, but it was irritating nonetheless. Annoying. Watching them made his back itch. Garfiel and Frederica had been like this ever since their reunion. While they pretended to be on acceptably friendly terms when others were around, things were actually poor.

Garfiel might look emotional and impulsive, but he was a surprisingly good actor when putting his mind to it. And there was no need to mention how well Frederica conducted herself. They probably had not been planning to, but the siblings had successfully deceived quite a number of people in this handful of days.

But it was obvious to Subaru, who had often caught the two of them alone, and now Emilia had witnessed it too.

Emilia: “It looks like Garfiel’s trying to approach her, but Frederica can’t look at him straight in the eye. Even though they’re finally back together. How come?”

Subaru: “It’s hard to enjoy the reunion when the goodbye had been so messy. I mean, I’m just going off my manga knowledge here, but I think the problem’s Frederica.”

Emilia was right— Garfiel was ready to be open with Frederica. But Frederica looked less promising. Frederica could be feeling guilt toward her brother, who had been left behind in Sanctuary. Over all that time, Garfiel sharpened his fangs to secure a stubborn, childish heart.

And that had comprised a third of the obstacles that Subaru had to deal with in Sanctuary. Yes, Frederica was partly responsible for Garfiel’s attitude.

But having said that, Frederica had not hurt Garfiel intentionally, and nobody was in the wrong. Actually, if there was anybody to be in the wrong, then that person would be Roswaal. And so, Subaru, nor anyone else for that matter, would cast blame on Garfiel or Frederica.

—But it seemed like the feelings of those two were different from the people around them.

Subaru: “Man, what a mess...”

It boiled down to Frederica having an excessively strong sense of responsibility.

Frederica had left for the outside world so that she could create a home for the people of Sanctuary once the barrier was broken. She carried an incredibly noble and lofty burden for a ten-or-so-year-old girl. Perhaps that ambition of hers might have actually arisen because she had left Garfiel behind.

Ultimately, Sanctuary was lost, and Frederica’s worries became reality.

But thanks to her actions, there were places ready to accept them, albeit scattered and shoddy. And that was something she ought to take pride in. Still, the guilt she felt surpassed her feeling of pride and accomplishment. Her guilty conscious must be overly strong.

Subaru: “What the hell, you can’t do that. When you pull off something amazing, you have to puff out your chest with pride.”

Emilia: “Mhm. I agree. And if you think you did something wrong, apologize. Then they’ll forgive you... I just want them to get along.”

Both Garfiel and Frederica had vanished from the hallway.

Emilia looked at the spot where the two had faced off, her amethyst eyes narrowing. Subaru peered at her and nodded.

Subaru: “Yeah.”

Subaru: “Alright. We’re gonna give them a little push so they can sort this out.”

Emilia: “Give them a push... You mean, have them make up?”

Subaru: “Yup. We have complicated brother-sister, sister-brother, human relations here. If the mood’s so sticky they can’t move, then how about some third parties cause enough ruckus to jolt things?”

Subaru clapped his hands, raising his finger as he made his proposal. Emilia considered it for a moment in silence, before giving a determined nod.

Emilia: “You’re right. Mhm, families should get along. Okay. Let’s do it. Let’s do our plumb best to have them make up.”

Subaru: “Who says plumb anymore?”

Muttered Subaru, as a motivated Emilia balled her hands into small fists. While thinking, “Man, it’s been a while since we’ve done those lines”.

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The reprieve from issues stemming from Sanctuary had only been brief, as the two problems of terrible post-processing and housing assaulted the Emilia’s camp for a while.

Roswaal’s plot (parts of which he claimed no responsibility for) had caused the mansion to go up in. They could rebuild it but reconstructing a building that had been burnt to a clean crisp would take time. It seemed that there was no convenient magic in this world to reform objects that had lost their shapes, nor any Fullmetal Alchemist-style techniques to erect buildings in an instant.

Their only choice had been to hire a builder from a nearby village or town, or perhaps an architect specializing in noble estates and villas, to build it.

Roswaal: “Hoooooooooover, that mansion was not my main house... It was an discreet spot to shelter Emilia-sama while leading up toooooooo the Royal Selection. I was planning to move to the main house shortly after the Selection started. Sooooooo it’s not as much of a problem aaaaaaaas you’re making it out to be.”

That had been Roswaal’s answer once they started looking for somewhere to relocate. Apparently, the Mathers family possessed several mansions on hand, and the main house had already been prepared as their base of operations.

Nobody was residing in the main estate, except for those maintaining the place. Once the workers had prepared everything to welcome their masters in, the group would relocate their headquarters there.

But where would they stay in the meantime?

Roswaal: “Don’t worry, thaaaaaat’s also been addressed. Some relatives of mine have a mansion in a region nooooooot far from Sanctuary. They are a branch of the Mathers family. We can stay there for a while. Though I suspect the large number of guests will trouble them.”

“Roswaal’s relatives” had been an incredibly unsettling phrase, but nobody had any better plan.

After that discussion, the main players in Emilia’s faction went to the relative’s mansion, while Arlam and Sanctuary’s people went to Arlam Village. Perhaps so that Sanctuary’s residents could be accepted as residents of Arlam, they were also purposefully introduced to other villages within Roswaal’s territory. Frederica had been the one who set the foundations for this, and it all ought to be considered her achievement.

Though, while all of Sanctuary’s residents were partly demi-human, they were also all half-bloods. None of them looked too different from an ordinary human, so blending in would not be too difficult. And though they might have different customs due to their ignorance of the outside world, the kind people of Arlam would surely teach them the basics without hesitation.

Everything might look settled, but the problems would keep piling up still. Even so, no obvious trouble was occurring at the present, since everybody had done their absolute best.

Subaru prayed that all the noticeable problems would be resolved before anything could happen.

—And so, he had judged Garfiel and Frederica’s relationship troubles as something to resolve during this blissful, boring period.

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Subaru: “And thus, masterplan Make Garfiel and Frederica Friends Again is a go... That’s sort of where we’re sitting, do you have any suggestions?”

Ram: “This is the first thing you say to me upon entering the room? Intruding on my peace is a heavy crime to pay, Barusu.”

With an emotionless voice, Ram was sitting down, glaring up at Subaru.

Her face was expressionless as always, but Subaru's relationship with her means he could make out the wisps of emotion swirling in her eyes. As a qualified interpreter of Ram's emotions, Subaru judged that she was currently displeased.

Subaru: "I know you look at me like that a lot, but does that mean that you're basically always displeased when interacting with me? Don't you ever get tired of being like that all day?"

Ram: "Do relax. I only do this when speaking with someone who is either annoying or pointless to interact with."

Subaru: "I see, alright th... Wait a second."

Subaru furrowed his brows at Ram as she implied that he was currently one of the two. Ram snorted at Subaru's reaction before closing the book in her hands.

She stood from her seat and offered it to Emilia, who stood beside Subaru.

Ram: "Here you are, Emilia-sama."

Emilia: "Thank you. But it's okay. I know it's exhausting if we stay for too long, so we'll be done quickly."

Ram: "I see. Then I shall gladly take it."

Subaru: "So you're not offering it to me. You weren't kidding about gladly, geez, nee-sama."

Subaru shrugged as Ram sat herself back in the chair. But something that Subaru had said made Ram's brows furrow slightly.

She must be reacting to the word "nee-sama".

Emilia: "Rem-san's still the same as before."

Ram: "...Indeed. Again today, she's sleeping so quietly that you cannot tell if she's alive."

Emilia spoke with concern, and Ram replied with her voice slightly lowered. On the bed next to Ram's chair, where the pair were looking, a girl was sleeping.

With short, blue hair and a face identical to Ram's. A light blue sleeping gown covered her, and the size of her chest as it pushed the blanket up was the only point of difference between her and Ram.

Obviously, this girl's name was Rem. She had remained asleep through the mansion fire and their relocation. Until they removed whatever was causing it, she would likely remain sleeping forever.

Subaru: "Do you feel like accepting it yet?"

Ram: "I did tell you. I am not so thoughtless as to believe everything when I have yet to speak to her... Although, what I'm seeing is far too persuasive to dismiss entirely."

Complex emotion rose in Ram's eyes, and Subaru ended up frowning.

Ram's expression as she watched Rem sleep was horribly melancholic from Subaru's perspective, being that he had known their relationship. The elder doted on the younger, and the younger respected the elder.

Rem and Ram's relationship had been the exact picture of beautiful, familial love.

As Rem slept, Ram's memories contained no name nor recollection nor existence of her beloved sister.

Subaru had known it would happen, he had anticipated it would happen, but it still made him horribly disconsolate. But even so—

Subaru: "You say it's complex, but you visit her every day."

Ram: "...I do wonder why. Honestly, not even I know what I'm trying to do. But being with this girl you call my sister soothes me... No, part of me is unsettled too, but..."

Subaru: "Unsettled?"

Ram: "It's not quite because I'm seeing my own face... When I look at her as she sleeps, I feel something stir in my heart. It is as though I'm chasing after mist, something which my hands will absolutely never grasp."

Ram put her hand to her chest. Subaru quietly gulped.

Everyone in the world except Subaru had forgotten Rem—but even so, she remained a thorn inside her only blood relative, Ram. The latter did not seem to know the name of that thorn, but if it was something that Rem had left to her dearest elder sister, then it was more than enough of a clue.

Subaru: “I’m open to tell you everything I can like the way she’s like or the times we’ve spent.”

Ram: “—I think it’s better not.”

Subaru offered to help Ram recover her memories, but Ram shook her head. Subaru’s brows furrowed as Ram put her hand to her chin in thought.

Ram: “It’s this, unreachable emptiness. It’s like there’s a hole inside me where she used to be. And if there is, anything you pour into it with will definitely spill out. And even now, just hearing she’s my sister... Her appearance is the most obvious indicator, but it still doesn’t feel real. It feels like the moment I stop these daily visits... even what I’m feeling now will disappear.”

Emilia: “...And that’s the curse of the Witch Cult’s Gluttony?”

Emilia interjected, looking like she could not let the topic slide. Ram looked up to find Emilia with her brows lowered, in a rare display of anger.

Ram: “A gross feast of Names and Memories... My impression of the Witch Cult was never good, but it’s certainly abhorrent now.”

Emilia: “...Witch Cult.”

Emilia let out a quiet mutter, her gaze lowered.

While Ram’s speculation surprised Subaru, her maliciousness also made him wince.

It did not feel real for Subaru, who remembered Rem clearly, but it was not that Rem’s existence was just missing from Ram and Emilia’s memories. It was that it was “missing in perpetuity”. Just how sand would never stop falling from an hourglass, it was continuous, ongoing now and forever.

Subaru: “We can’t do anything unless we stop what’s causing it...”

The more Subaru talked about their memories together, the quicker the sand would fall. Perhaps even Subaru would forget the memory the second he voiced it.

Ram was concerned that Rem would disappear from the world—or at least that must be part of it.

Ram: “It seems that you have some thoughts about the Cult, Emilia-sama.”

Subaru bit his lip while Ram looked up at Emilia. Her pale cheeks stiffened as Ram’s cerise eyes gazed at her, before she slowly nodded.

Emilia: “I’ve done lots of thinking about the Witch. Because I have been cursed at so much for looking like her... But, the Cult is...”

Ram: “———”

Emilia: “Apparently it is something I wanted to forget. But I can’t regard the one I remember and the one that existed now as one and the same. What could have happened since then, now that it’s like this...? That’s what I want to find out.”

Subaru: “I don’t really wanna say this, Emilia-tan, but... you get that they’re not people you can really communicate with? It will probably end up as a painful experience.”

He did not want to snuff Emilia’s will, but it was unfair for him not to say it. The Witch Cult that Subaru knew was a giant mass of malice constructed by a bunch of religious nutcases. He did not know what it used to be like. But that was what the cult was like presently.

Emilia: “Thank you. For worrying about me.”

Subaru’s concern made Emilia smile slightly, and she shook her head.

Emilia: “It’s okay, I understand. What happened in my memories, and the people I was with... All of that happened a century ago. There’s no way they could still be alive. A person’s lifespan is usually one-hundred-years long. That’s a reeeally long time, so I don’t think I can meet them again.”

Subaru: “But you still want to know what happened... right?”

Emilia: “I’m sorry, I know it’s selfish. But I think I’m the only one who needs to find out. Because I’m the only one who saw what happened there, and the feelings that were there... and what Juice and Mother felt.”

Emilia’s eyes were sad as she imagined the two, but her mouth remained set in a gentle smile. That was her mother’s name, and Juice. Those were important memories for Emilia, and apparently connected to the old, completely different Witch Cult.

Subaru: “Got some really mixed feelings here, Juice-san...”

Muttered Subaru to himself with a sigh, somewhat resentful toward someone he had never even seen. Emilia felt familiarity and sorrow for the name, and hearing it gave Subaru complex feelings. If the Witch Cult had not changed its course from the time Juice had been in it, Emilia probably would not have been put through so much crisis.

If he was going to be Emilia’s ally anyway, Subaru would appreciate if he could have stayed at her side from start to finish. That was the breed of selfish resentment he found himself thinking.

Ram: “—I doubt I can be as kind as you, Emilia-sama.”

Although as quiet as ever, her voice was full of chilling animosity. Subaru’s breath hitched as he looked at Ram, who in turn looked at Rem. Her face was expressionless, but the glint in her eye was shockingly red.

Ram: “The Witch Cult’s particulars have nothing to do with me. I will not object to your desires to hear their story, Emilia-sama. I won’t, but do remember that my revenge is another matter entirely.”

Emilia: “Ram...”

Ram: “I could not care less about this Witch Cult or Gluttony, but Ram return what is given, be it debts or enmity. Dismembering that heart-gouging devil still won’t be enough for me.”

Grisly rage overflowed from Ram, her petite frame seeming to blur.

As if a giant were there, emitting an overwhelming sense of presence— Indeed, as if an oni were there.

Ram: “I’ll eviscerate Gluttony so thoroughly that the memory demands awe.”

Rather than resolve, that was more of a death sentence.

The recipient was absent, and her tone was utterly calm. Nevertheless, that was unmistakably a death sentence— It felt like an icicle had speared down Subaru's spine, making him hesitate even to speak.

Subaru: "-----"

With that, silence fell upon the room.

Even the noise from his fidgeting felt like it would break the tense atmosphere, so Subaru was unable to move. What does shatter the stressful mood is in fact the person who caused it.

Ram: "It was unlike me to say that."

She sighed, the tense atmosphere vanishing entirely. Subaru lowered his shoulders in relief,

Subaru: "No, that was not unlike you. The Ram I know was someone who did get violent when stuff involved her little sister."

Ram: "...I see."

Ram's statements had been disturbing, but she had definitely been thinking purely about Rem as she spoke them. Subaru appraised it on that point alone, making him feel glad for Ram's sentiments. Besides, Subaru could not forgive Gluttony either. If he could then he would have Gluttony's neck for himself, without even handing it over to Ram.

The sensation of murder— The sloppy conclusion to his fight with Petelgeuse had left very little direct feeling in Subaru's palms. Perhaps Subaru's hesitation toward taking a life would make him hesitate at the critical moment.

But still, he could not forgive Gluttony, and he had the resolve to do it if it meant saving Rem.

Subaru: "...We got really off topic."

Subaru scratched his head, his dark thoughts not showing in his expression.

Ram looked at him meaningfully, and Emilia looked at him concernedly, but Subaru had managed to smile at both of them, surely.

Ram: “You’re right. Now, since you’re intruding on me as I enjoy my unexpected holiday, I’m sure your business must be suitably important.”

Subaru: “Why are you so audacious when pressuring people? Frederica’s in your position and she feels so apologetic about getting guest treatment that she’s helping in the mansion...”

Ram: “Ram is wounded. And Frederica’s the one failing to read the mood by working when she’s being received as a guest. She can’t stay composed on anything related to Garf, and Clind is inciting her into it too.”

Subaru: “Clind-san is?”

That was the name of the Mathers family’s young butler tending to Subaru and the others. He was handsome, with a slender face, who exuded an incredible aura of grace and capability. He let out a similar vibe to Julius, but unlike Julius, Clind was polite and incredibly considerate.

And so, Subaru thought it strange that Ram did not seem to think too fondly of him. Though, perhaps, that was just what everyone besides Roswaal looked in Ram’s eyes.

Ram: “You should ask Frederica and Clind themselves about how poorly they interact. Anyway, Ram would like to return to her reading, so do state your business quickly.”

Emilia: “I’m sorry, we just keep on talking. I think Subaru mentioned this right at the start, but it’s about Frederica and Garfiel...”

Emilia valorously tried to change the topic.

“Let’s do something about Garfiel and Frederica’s awkward relationship!” had been a nice idea and all, but Subaru and Emilia had found themselves absolutely stuck on what to do, since neither of them were very experienced when it came to mending sibling relationships.

Subaru was an established only-child, and so was Emilia. Neither of them had been blessed with siblings, so nothing came to mind when it comes to non-parental blood relations. And in Garfiel and Frederica's case, they did not even have ordinary parental relations, but that part would be left aside.

So they had wandered around the mansion in search of advice, and visited Ram, who stayed in a fixed location.

And Subaru considered her the closest sister he knew. Though her relationship with Rem was gone from everyone's memory except Subaru's, he hoped that Ram might have something useful to say, considering that she and her sister had had such a good relationship.

And even disregarding that, Ram was Garfiel and Frederica's childhood friend. Maybe something from an episode that Subaru had not been around for would make her come up with an approach to fill this decade-long divide.

Emilia sent Ram an expectant gaze, when her lips come to a halt.

Subaru tilted his head at the frozen Emilia, wondering what had happened, before following her gaze—and freezing still as well.

Ram: "...What?"

Ram narrowed her eyes, looking terribly uncomfortable.

In her hands she held a book, at which Emilia and Subaru stared.

The title, "How to Grow Closer to Your Younger Sibling", was horrifically critical to the current affair.

—It seemed that they were not the only ones feeling clueless about sibling relations.

One Day II Chapter 2 - Young Souls and Watcher

Has been cut from the Light Novel Adaptation

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

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Having learned that Ram was useless regarding sibling problems without her memory, but that she was nonetheless a good sister, time passed on for Subaru and Emilia with no good progress.

Subaru: “But don’t you feel like Ram was being pretty unsympathetic?”

Emilia: “Don’t say that. Ram has her own opinions... She’s known them longer than we have, so that’s probably the difference.”

Emilia smiled wryly at the pouting Subaru as they walked down the mansion hallway.

They had left Rem’s bedroom and were reflecting on the encounter as they ventured about. Through Subaru’s mind passed the words that Ram had left them with before their departure.

Ram: “Garf and Frederica’s relationship? It should be fine to just leave them be. They are not children. Well, Garf is a kid, but he’s not that thoughtless. Though said thoughts tend to be inaccurate. They will manage something on their own.”

It was a rather ruthless judgement of Garfiel, what with how fond he was of Ram. But it was possible that Ram regarded Garfiel as something like a younger brother. His crush could be called cute, were the feelings not so intense and violent.

Poor Garfiel, infatuated with a fortress of a woman.

Emilia: “—? Hm? What’s wrong?”

Subaru: “No, it’s nothing. Was just reflecting that Garfiel’s not the only one looking at a tall hurdle.”

Emilia: “—?”

Emilia tilted her head cutely. Subaru hated how her mind utterly failed to put together what his gaze and words meant. Perhaps the fact that he ended up forgiving it, was one of those shortcomings of loving someone.

Subaru: “Anyway, so Ram’s out. Who to consult next?”

Emilia: “Huh? You’re going to keep trying without giving up?”

Subaru: “Well yeah. We haven’t solved anything yet, and there’s nothing manly about giving up because you stumbled on the first step. Don’t you want to improve their relationship too, Emilia-tan?”

Emilia: “I do, but Ram knows them best, and that’s what she said, so maybe that’s the best thing to do.”

Subaru: “Leaving them be might solve the problem over time, but you cannot forget that it’s been a decade since they parted. I’m not going to wait another decade for them to reconcile. I want to give them a push so they make up quickly.”

Subaru insisted that they stick with the plan, while Emilia seemed somewhat pressured by Ram’s statement. That said, while Subaru did want Garfiel and Frederica to reconcile, he also did not want this chance to do things with Emilia to escape.

Since no matter what Subaru would do regarding this issue, it would not escalate into bloodshed. Could this heart, after all that time-consuming trial and error, ever feel so light?

Emilia: “What happened? Subaru, you just burst into a grin...”

Subaru: “No, was just thinking that mulling over things without being frantic about it is bliss. Wow! No matter the result, there’s no bloodshed and nobody dies!”

Emilia: “Subaru...”

Subaru shots her a thumbs-up, his teeth sparkling, but Emilia looked at him with incredible pity. Subaru thought back on his statement, figuring that he must have said something strange. And then shocked himself at what a brutal, inappropriate comment it was, and how overly modest his desires were.

Subaru: “D—Disregard that, Emilia-tan.”

Emilia: “It’s okay. I know it’s been hard. I’m sorry I didn’t realize how you felt. Subaru, maybe you should spend the day resting in your ro—”

Subaru: “No, not happening and that reaction’s for when you don’t realize how I feel!”

Subaru raised his voice at Emilia, who gazed at him with sympathy.

And, at that point in the conversation,

???: “...So you are the ones making this racket, I suppose.”

A sighing, stunned voice. Subaru looked over to the speaker, to find a girl in an extravagant dress standing there— Beatrice. She had come from the other end of the hallway and stopped to look at Subaru and Emilia, her brows furrowed on her cute face.

Beatrice: “You two are certainly enjoying yourselves, in fact. I can hear your arguing from the other end of the mansion, I suppose.”

Subaru: “That’s some sarcasm. If you’re sad you’re not included, then just say it. We’ll let you deliberate with us in our profound discussion hour.”

Beatrice: “Who said anyone is sad about being left out, in fact! Don’t just go saying whatever you want, I suppose!”

Beatrice crossed her arms, her cheeks red with indignation. Both Subaru and Emilia had to smile at how incredibly Beatrice that attitude was.

About a week had passed since Subaru and Beatrice formed their Contract. That said, nothing especially dramatic had changed about their relationship. Subaru would tease Beatrice like always, and Beatrice would overreact. These exact same exchanges repeated endlessly for these two.

But Beatrice had been more out and about lately, having lost the Forbidden Library. And sometimes, as if remembering something, she would arrive and hold Subaru’s hand.

Subaru: “That might be what you say, but really you’re here because you wanna hold my hand. Oh geez, this poor girl’s too much.”

Beatrice: “Don’t distort Betty’s actions by giving them these weird pretexts, in fact. Circumstances demand that Betty keeps touching yo... Subaru’s hand, I suppose.”

Subaru: “It is adorable how you reminded yourself to say that.”

Emilia: “Subaru.”

Emilia cautioned Subaru as Beatrice’s face turned red. Subaru poked his tongue out at Emilia and reached out for Beatrice. Her hand lightly closed around his fingers, before then thinking about it again, and timidly grasping his hand proper. It was what Beatrice always did.

He felt her small fingers on his palm. This tickly, awkward touch was the fruit of Subaru’s hard work. But this time Beatrice did not react, instead she simply staring at Subaru’s hand, hesitant.

Subaru: “What’s up? I do wash my hands after going to the bathroom.”

Beatrice: “I wasn’t worried about that, but now that thought’s going to be in my head and it’s disgusting, in fact! No, it’s something else...”

Beatrice glared in response to Subaru’s unnecessary comment, glanced behind herself. Subaru tilted his head at that, when he heard the answer come from down the hallway.

???: “Where’d you go, Beatrice-chan?”

A voice called from down the hallway, beyond a corner, searching for Beatrice. The voice was female, filled with affection and friendship. But hearing it made Beatrice’s shoulders hitch up—

Beatrice: “Eep!”

Beatrice squeaked, her eyes darting around before she dove into a nearby room. Subaru and Emilia watched on wide-eyed as Beatrice peeked out from behind the door.

Beatrice: “Tell her that I’m not here, I suppose. Please, in fact.”

Subaru: “Hey.”

Beatrice: “Please, I suppose.”

With that, she silently shut the door. Subaru shrugged while Emilia furrowed her brows in confusion. Then,

???: “Oh! Subaru!”

A girl appeared from beyond the bend in the hallway, her face lighting up as she darted over. With the skirt of her maid outfit fluttering, the auburn-haired girl trotted near— Petra.

She was also staying in this mansion following the incineration of Roswaal’s manor. Considering the danger that accompanied being involved, Subaru had tried to convince her to go back to the village, but she refused to listen.

Petra had been utterly focused on helping with odd jobs around the mansion, as part of her maid training. “What an ambitious, disciplined girl”, Subaru thought.

As if complimenting Subaru’s thoughts, Petra gave a polite curtsey to Emilia..

Petra: “Please forgive me, Emilia-sama. I present my apology for having raised my voice.”

And said that.

The childishness she had displayed toward Subaru instantly disappeared, and Emilia’s eyes widened at the maidly behavior.

Emilia: “Ah, um, it’s okay. Don’t worry. You can please relax, knave.”

Subaru: “Emilia-tan, «knave»?”

Emilia was going to need to learn how to respond when others would humble themselves around her. But putting aside that messy-yet-heartwarming conversation,

Subaru: “So, what’s up, Petra. Something happen?”

Petra: “No, nothing has happened... But since I’ve finished my work, I was thinking to entertain Beatrice-chan. But I have not been able to find her.”

Emilia: “Beatrice-chan... Gosh.”

Emilia’s breath hitched, and she put her hand to her mouth as she restrained her laughter. Subaru also came close to snickering. Beatrice, for all her haughtiness, had been dubbed with a «chan» by Petra¹⁹³.

Subaru had burst into laughter when he first caught them interacting.

Petra: “Is there something the matter, Emilia-sama? Have I perhaps said anything strange?”

Emilia: “No, nothing. I just thought that was a bit reeeally funny.”

Petra: “«A bit», but «reeeally»?”

However though, sometimes Petra’s childishness did come to the fore. Emilia gave her a smile and glanced to Subaru, her gaze asking him what to do. Subaru pretended to mull over the issue.

Subaru: “Right. Beatrice. She loves the attention, so I’m sure you have fun fussing over her too?”

Petra: “Mhm, I do. Beatrice-chan isn’t honest at all, and she’s super cute whenever I’m with her. I don’t think people like her should be left on their own.”

Subaru: “Why do you think that?”

Petra: “Because she’d be lonely. You can’t leave her alone.”

Subaru nodded to Petra’s smart-yet-simple reply, letting out a “that’s right”.

It had taken a lot of words to get there, but ultimately it was the same reasoning Subaru had used to drag Beatrice out of the Forbidden Library. Children saw the truth of things. Or really Subaru and Beatrice had argued at each other using child’s logic.

¹⁹³ You are probably already aware, but «-chan» is a honorific used for familiar people, especially younger girls. Which means Petra was basically putting Beatrice at the same level as a friendly person her age. Adorable.

Petra: “How come you’re laughing as well now, Subaru?”

Subaru: “It’s not that I’m making fun of you. It’s just that you’re so brilliant, Petra.”

Petra: “Really? Eheehee.”

Subaru pat Petra’s head and gave her a nod. Then he put his hand on the doorknob behind him, and swung the door open.

Beatrice: “Whaagh!?”

With a thunk, an eavesdropping loli was sent to the floor.

She pushed herself back up, her eyes teary and forehead red from having the door against it.

Subaru: “What the heck are you doing?”

Beatrice: “More like what the heck are you doing to me, in fact! This hurts! This sincerely hurts, I suppose! It hurts and furthermore you broke your promise...”

Subaru: “I didn’t promise anything, and I didn’t even say I would do it. After taking careful consideration on who to support, I decided that supporting Petra would be funnier.”

Beatrice: “Funnier! Funnier, he says, in fact! Just abysmal, I suppose!”

Complained Beatrice, rubbing her forehead while Subaru blocked his ears, pretending not to hear her. When a girl cut into their exchange; Petra faced Beatrice directly, making Beatrice’s mouth gawk open and pigtails bob.

Beatrice: “Ah, erm, um, don’t get the wrong idea, in fact... I, I wasn’t hiding from you or anyth...”

Petra: “Come on, Beatrice-chan. You’re going to get told off if you play hide and seek in other people’s mansions. Though I understand wanting to play so much you can’t help it...”

Beatrice: “What!? S—stop acting as though Betty were a child, I suppose! Though I might look like this, I am properly an... Erm, properly an...”

Petra: “Properly an?”

Beatrice: "...Never mind, in fact."

In the end, Beatrice surrendered. Emilia looked surprised, and Subaru also closed his eye at the unfamiliar happenings.

The entertaining thing about Beatrice and Petra's relationship was that, somehow, Petra was the dominant one. Beatrice always maintained a haughty, bullish attitude when interacting with anyone. Subaru and Puck had been the exceptions, and now Petra had thrust herself into that count.

For some reason, Beatrice could not interact with Petra using her normal demeanor. Not even she seemed to understand why was that. But Subaru had spotted her holding hands with Petra, looking rather reluctant about the whole thing, several times now.

No matter what Beatrice would think of it, to an outsider they were just a couple of young girls. And two girls, with portents of feature beauty, holding hands. A charming spectacle.

Petra looked slightly older than Beatrice. Perhaps it was happening because Beatrice struggled to counterbalance Petra when the latter behaved like an older sister.

Petra: "Okay, let's go. We don't want to interrupt Subaru and Emilia-sama's work. And Clind-keisama¹⁹⁴ got some sweets for us, so let's go eat them together. In the dining room."

Beatrice: "O—Okay, I suppose. I'll go... So you don't need to pull me along, in fact."

Beatrice sent a pleading look Subaru's way, as Petra led her out of the room by the hand, but Subaru cruelly replied with a thumbs-up. Emilia waved her goodbye as Petra dragged Beatrice away, still looking mad and with her tongue sticking out.

That skin-ship that was demanded by circumstances with Subaru would have to come later. Emilia put her finger to her lip as she contently watched one girl abduct the other.

Emilia: "That is reeeally surprising. I did not expect Beatrice to be weak to Petra."

¹⁹⁴ Respectful honorific that stands for "older brother" (兄様).

Subaru: “Right? It stunned me at first. It’s adorable to watch though, so I didn’t say anything. And I think Petra’s totally right.”

Emilia: “She will be sad if left alone?”

Subaru: “I don’t mind being with her all hours of the day, but that would defeat the purpose of having leave the Library. If she’s making memories, then the pages of her photo album ought to have as many people in them as possible.”

Because she had to compensate for four centuries of blank pages. If Subaru consumed all the space in her album, it was going to get really old really fast. Her memories needed to be full of lots of people and lots of faces. Subaru believed it was best to stand at her side as she clicked the shutter, sometimes slipping into the frame.

Emilia: “Subaru... Sometimes you are reeeally cool.”

Subaru: “Huh, what, seriously? What happened, what kinda RNG¹⁹⁵ was that!?”

Emilia: “It really is only sometimes though.”

Subaru scratched his cheek with a “You what now?”, as Emilia giggled. While it had been joking somewhat, compliments from Emilia inevitably got him excited. He wanted to always be reminded of this feeling whenever he teased Beatrice. He had to keep teasing her.

Subaru: “Feels like the aims and the means swapped places, but you do get that sometimes. Now, we got to see that heartwarming sight, so next is...”

???: “Indeed, a heartwarming sight. The spectacle of two girls with their lovely souls, smiling as they join hands... That is this world’s splendor. Radiance.”

Emilia: “Eek!?”

Just when Subaru started moving to the next topic, a voice making Emilia yelp spoke up. Because the speaker’s arrival was just that abrupt and unexpected.

¹⁹⁵ Literally “random number generator”, but often times used to denote a random event in video games.

And their location was just as unexpected as their arrival. This character stood just behind Subaru, so close that the latter could feel the other's breath on his neck, their expression nonchalant as they joined the conversation.

???: "I do apologize for the surprise. But I could not suppress my occupational urge to present you with astonishing service. Misfire."

Subaru: "C—Clind-san?"

Clind: "Yes, this is Clind. I hope that I have not fouled your temper? Trepidation."

A handsome, slender man delivered them a perfect bow.

His blue hair was just long enough to touch his shoulders, and he wore a monocle on his left eye. His stiff, black butler suit seemed to take joy in being his clothing as it perfectly displayed its potential, his every movement so refined that Subaru unwittingly stood up straight.

This man's posture was so perfect that it could be a match for Wilhelm's, but the aura that Clind exerted differed from the Sword Demon's.

If Wilhelm gave the impression of a honed blade, then Clind was the flow of pristine waters. Material beauty was dissimilar to conceptual beauty, though both did soothe the mind equally.

Subaru: "It's kinda crappy to show up behind people out of nowhere, Clind-san... Almost had a heart attack."

Clind: "Should that occur, we will devote our utmost efforts into your resuscitation. There is no need to fret, for everything is well. Death's door."

Subaru: "Hm!? Except that's no help at all!?"

While Clind's polite gestures remained strong, his reply fell apart terribly.

However, his current behavior gave no indication of his personality or capabilities. Clind was as excellent a servant as he appeared, being the model butler of the Milord household. Although young, he kept the mansion in order with his bold personality.

And that was not all—he was even capable of swordsmanship in an emergency. He was so skilled that, upon first meeting, Garfiel tried to pick a fight with him, and appraised him at “guy’s pretty freakin’ good”. Though Clind went on to ignore the duel invitation.

However, for all of Clind’s excellence, he did have some flaws. One of them was his demonstrated penchant for mischief. Another was,

Emilia: “Petra hasn’t been any trouble for you, has she? I know that you’re letting her take up part of the work, but I’m still kind of worried...”

Clind: “There is no need for worry. Petra is outstanding for a girl of her age. I await to see how her proficiency and beauty shall bloom. Envy.”

Emilia: “I see. Thank goodn—”

Clind: “However, she shall grow into an adult... Which I find a terrible shame. Chagrin.”

Clind furrowed his brows, looking utterly disappointed. That was one of his flaws, and a big one.

He was extremely interested in young girls like Petra and Beatrice. Putting it straight, he was into little girls—a lolicon.

Clind: “What could be the matter, Natsuki-sama? You look as though you’ve seen a prospective criminal. Have I perhaps done something untoward? Confirmation.”

Subaru: “It somewhat seems as though you’re self-aware about it, considering how precise that comment was. I’m not into younger girls, but seriously, when they’re so young...”

Clind: “It appears that you could be under a terrible misapprehension. Smile.”

“Smile”, he said, while not smiling in the least. His attractive face darkened in dejection as he adjusted his monocle and turned to face Subaru.

Clind: “Do I have your attention? I do not admire Annerose-sama, nor Petra nor Beatrice-sama because they are young. It is because I am infatuated with the promise and youth of their souls. To be enraptured by pure, immaculate souls is natural. And it happens that many possessors of such souls are young. Thus, misapprehension.”

Subaru: "Well, that's just great."

Clind gave a speech to rebut Subaru, though Subaru had been tuned out for most of it. However, Clind's next words destroyed that attitude of Subaru's. He looked at Emilia, and started again with an "In fact",

Clind: "My eyes perceive a similar shine to Emilia-sama's soul. Purity."

Emilia: "Me?"

Subaru: "Goddamnit, geez, Clind-san!"

Emilia tilted her head. Subaru could only find himself shocked and awed at Clind's perception.

It should not be possible to determine that Emilia's mental age was much lower than she appeared without investigating her background and upbringing. Clind's eyes had penetrated straight through that, and he had ascertained that Emilia was a mental loli.

A lolicon's nose was to be feared, was Subaru's assessment in dumb astonishment.

Subaru: "So then Ryuzu-san or something'd be..."

Clind: "Her appearance is exceedingly adorable, but her soul is matured. It is beyond the means of someone as immature as I to find promise from someone so set in their ways. Recklessness."

Subaru: "Amazing..."

It truly impressed Subaru that he could see through the loli-granny.

Emilia had been party to the exchange, but did not seem particularly interested in Clind's fetishes.

Emilia: "Clind-san, there was something I kind of want to ask..."

Clind: "Please ask whatever you wish. Inquiry."

Emilia: "Did Frederica use to work here before she started working in Roswaal's mansion?"

Clind: "...Indeed. Affirmation."

Subaru furrowed his brows, sensing that Clind had been tongue-tied for a second. The hesitation made Emilia blink too, but the conversation continued on its previous flow.

Emilia: “Which means that you’ve known Frederica for a long time?”

Clind: “Frederica and I have known each other for a decade—— I was still a manservant who had only just begun work when the Margrave brought Frederica to the Milord household. We have known each other since then. Old friends.”

Emilia: “I knew it! Okay, so I have a question about Frederica. Is there anything she likes or dislikes that we can use as a starting point for her to reconcile with Garfiel?”

Clind: “A starting point for reconciliation. Ruminating.”

Clind put his hand to his chin, in thought. He looked as beautiful as a portrait even while ruminating. Subaru fiddled with his track suit zipper while lamenting “So hot guys can get away with being lolicons...” about the amazing differences in beauty.

After a minute of thought, Clind nodded with a quiet sigh.

Clind: “I shall make chicken the primary dish for Annerose-sama’s next birthday. Plan.”

Emilia: “Where’d Frederica go!?”

Clind: “...Ah, forgive me. Whenever I attempt to meditate upon her, my brain unfailingly rejects it. I’m afraid this is my quirk. Beg your pardon.”

Emilia: “Do you maybe not get along with Frederica, Clind-san?”

Clind: “Preposterous. Denial.”

Clind shook his head at Emilia.

Clind: “She is an excellent servant who conducts her work swiftly and accurately, and is also proficient in caring for others. Should you ignore her appearance spoils her station, what demands the maid to be adorned in splendor and beauty, I have not any complaints about her. Indifferent.”

Emilia: “Hm? I think I just heard something extremely prejudiced, but is that just me? Subaru?”

Subaru: “No, it’s not just you, it’s just Clind-san.”

It seemed like Clind’s unrelenting prejudice had its origin in Frederica’s appearance. While yes, its initial impact had indeed startled Subaru, Frederica was actually both diligent and abounding in femininity. There was nothing wrong about her as a woman except her appearance.

Clind: “I sense that Natsuki-sama has reached the same conclusion as myself. Espy.”

Emilia: “Is that so? Subaru?”

Subaru: “I’m trying to end my habit of looking for other people’s flaws, so could you please not!? Emilia-tan your looks are a mega critical on me!”

Emilia: “That’s not what we were talking about, geez... But, thank you.”

Said Emilia, her cheeks slightly flushed. These compliments had seemed utterly ineffective before, but ever since had Emilia finished the Trials they had started working on her somewhat, which was novel.

Puck was not around to give Emilia lessons on fashion anymore, and she had gotten into the practice of dealing with her own grooming and dress. Apparently, she had been doing some trial and error on what looked stylish.

Though naturally, on that one time she started thinking about chopping her silver hair short, everyone collectively yanked the breaks on it.

Either way, it did not seem like they were going to get any useful information about Frederica from Clind. Subaru and Emilia sighed, hitting a quick dead end yet again.

Clind, watching that exchange, interrupted with “Simply as speculation”,

Clind: “Judging by what I have heard, could you be seeking an improvement to the sibling relationship between Frederica and Garfiel-sama? Conjecture.”

Emilia: “Yes, we are. But neither me nor Subaru have any brothers or sisters, so we have no idea what to do. We’ve been asking around, but...”

Clind: "Being that Frederica's only issue is her appearance, I believe that issues pertaining to Frederica that are unrelated to her appearance will resolve themselves if left alone. But it seems that you may find this stance unsatisfactory. And so I offer. Proposal."

Both: "Proposal?"

Clind raised his finger. Subaru and Emilia tilted their heads in unison. For the first time that day, Clind smiled.

Clind: "If you are concerned about them, then should you not speak to the person closest to them? Not Ram, but another? Opinion."

Emilia: "Closest to them... Oh!"

Emilia clapped her hands, her eyes shooting open as she finally happened upon this idea. Subaru reached the same conclusion, but something was bothering him first.

Subaru: "Not Ram? I am pretty sure we only mentioned her ages ago, Clind-san, how long have you been listening to us talk?"

Clind: "It is because I am the butler entrusted with the peace and chores of the Milord household. Declaration."

It somewhat sounded like an answer, and yet also didn't to a degree. Subaru scrunched his face up while Clind bowed respectfully.

His conduct as a subordinate was so perfect that it would overwhelm any observers. All Subaru could do was shutting his mouth, and looking sour.

One Day II Chapter 3 - Pretty Girl, Pretty Lady, Pretty Granny

Has been cut from the Light Novel Adaptation

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

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Subaru: “And thus we hastened to speak with Ryuzu-san, who we figure knows them best.”

Ryuzu: “I’d call yer approach thorough, all told. I don’t mind that yer relying on me... but I don’t get much I can say on the topic.”

Subaru: “Meaning?”

Ryuzu: “Meanin’ I agree with Ram and Clin-bo. Their problem’s their problem. It’s not somethin’ outsiders needta get too involved with.”

It didn’t seem like Ryuzu was too interested in Subaru’s proposal as she sipped her tea. However, she was undeniably a key figure in this whole affair. Subaru was sticking his neck into their business with too little frivolity to back down that easily.

Subaru: “I get that their circumstances are an annoying mess. Since I’ve been involved in it, if only tangentially.”

Ryuzu: “...”

Subaru: “But I don’t think it’s something to just leave alone. I mean maybe it will resolve itself in time... But the way they’re trying settle things is aggravating both to them and to onlookers. It just isn’t working. If a there’s something a third party can do about it, then they should.”

Ryuzu: “That sounds like a load of hard-nosed meddlin’.”

Subaru: “Well I do have a reputation for being shameless and dense.”

Subaru puffed his chest out in pride although it likely had not been a compliment. Ryuzu smiled wryly at him.

The two of them were in a corner of the large room given to Ryuzu, sitting across from each other at a table as they sipped from their cups, silently wetting their throats with tea. When,

???: “Excuse me, guys?”

A voice called to them from a short distance away.

The speaker narrowed their amethyst eyes, their gaze akin to glare as it pierced Subaru. The voice of the speaker was laced with dissatisfaction, unincluded as she was in the conversation, Emilia.

Subaru: “What’s up, Emilia-tan? I mean, you’re cute when you’re angry, but your forehead’s getting all wrinkled.”

Emilia: “If you think so, then shouldn’t you come and help me a little!? Geez! Subaru’s a meany! You ninny!”

Subaru: “Who says «ninny» anymore?”

Subaru smiled at Emilia’s proficient and adorable use of outdated language as he set down his teacup. He looked again at Emilia, and tilted his head at the situation she faced.

Subaru: “You can really call this a spectacle. A fantastical drama unfolding between a pretty lady and pretty girls.”

Ryuzu: “Yer gonna make me blush, sayin’ that.”

Subaru: “You join in too, and it’ll be a drama between pretty girls, a pretty lady and a pretty granny.”

Ryuzu: “Yer gonna make me blush, sayin’ that.”

Subaru: “Seriously!?”

It shocked Subaru that, just when he had expected her to grumble at him, she accepted it. Ryuzu’s cheeks as she watched on with Subaru were faintly red.

The two of them gazed at a bunch of Ryuzus identical to the blushing one, surrounding Emilia in a mob.

—They had brought twenty-six Ryuzu doubles from Sanctuary in total.

Those were the subservient, non-sentient doubles who were not the representative Ryuzu. Though the faction had no tasks for them, they could not simply leave them sitting there, so they presented yet another issue for everybody to mull over.

And the biggest problem was—

Emilia: “Don’t just look, Subaru, come help me.”

Subaru: “I’d love to, but they’re not gonna listen to me. You and Garfiel are the only ones who can command them. Just have to order them with some witty eloquent language.”

Emilia: “I know, but... we just had a terrible fiasco when I told them to step away. Did you forget, Subaru?”

Subaru: “Nobody would forget an organized search effort that last for three days going all the way over the mountains.”

Subaru thought back on the debacle from three days ago.

Crystals in Sanctuary governed the doubles’ command right. One had been installed in the Tomb, and one in the laboratory, each of which recognized either Emilia or Garfiel as holders for that right, and presently continued to do so.

Meaning that the doubles remained in a doll-like state, unable to act without Emilia or Garfiel’s orders. They paid no heed to anyone else’s instructions. Garfiel said that, if they were left without any tasks, they would literally sit there doing nothing until they died and disappeared.

The debacle from three days ago had happened when Emilia, ignorant to the command right’s limits, tried to have the doubles spread out a little distance from the mansion by telling them to step away. The annoying part was that the doubles had their own personal differences, and interpreted the command in slightly different ways. Some of them perfectly adhered to Emilia’s intentions, some of them exited the mansion, and some of them sprinted far from the mansion into the distance.

Were it not for Garfiel's nose and legs, they would not have retrieved all of them. They couldn't just leave these cute, doll-like girls walking around undefended. And it would be problematic if people started questioning the doubles.

Subaru: "Twins or triplets would be one thing, but nobody's gonna believe in twenty-sextuplets..."

Subaru did not remember what the Guinness World Record was, but it was probably less than ten. There was no point even considering it, as there was no way they could use the siblings excuse in this situation.

And as for why they had to come up with excuses in the first place,

Ryuzu: "They were obviously made using forbidden techniques. Frankly said, it'd be an uproar if people found out what we were."

Subaru: "Figures."

Ryuzu: "Yer takin' someone as a foundation point, and constructin' artificial Od of a similar nature to make them— essentially, yer makin' infinite soldiers. There's people out there who'll want that."

Leaving aside the question of practicality there, they were useful for research, as they presented an infinite subject base, to put it simply. One could use the command right to keep them from rebelling, and they would disperse into Mana upon death, so there would nothing to clean up.

Subaru: "Which is all absolute shit."

Ryuzu: "It relaxes us to know ya think that, Su-bo."

Subaru felt something indescribable as he watched Ryuzu smile thinly. Repulsion that his acquaintance could be exploited, and aversion due to the ethical issue. Those feelings were why Subaru was adverse to the concept.

But once he dispelled those feelings, and considered the technique in a vacuum, how long would his resistance really hold against its sheer convenience?

Everyone, including him, pursued an easier method. "Hate being so weak", he thought.

Emilia: "Okay! So what am I meant to do?"

Emilia yelled, having been somewhat excluded from the situation, as she hit her limit.

The mob of Ryuzus wasn't doing anything, but the silent pressure they exerted on Emilia was not good for her mental health.

Subaru crossed his arms as he wondered what to do.

Subaru: "Maybe try settling them down with an order that can't be misinterpreted?"

Emilia: "Like? They went so far when I just told them to step away, so I don't know what to..."

Subaru: "I think saying «sit down» would work?"

Emilia: "...Subaru, you're a genius."

"It's nothing that brilliant", thought Subaru while Emilia asked the Ryuzus to sit, and they each plonked themselves down on the spot.

It felt like Emilia was a teacher in a kindergarten, now that all these little girls were sitting cross-legged around her, but actually the situation was more desperate than that. They had to come up with some smart way to deal with them. Subaru had some relevant proposals he wanted to make once Roswaal returned, so now it was an issue of waiting for him.

Subaru: "Since there's twenty-six of them, naming them after the letters of the alphabet might work to give an identity to each of them, and remember all of them."

Ryuzu: "Ya look like yer up to some nefarious plottin' again, Su-bo."

Subaru: "«Nefarious plottin'» makes it sound bad. All I'm doing is working my brain so everyone I know reaches a happy conclusion."

Subaru gave her a big grin. Ryuzu sighed, looking astonished.

Had she found his efforts credible or not? Subaru optimistically decided that his smile had just looked untrustworthy. When Emilia, freed from the swarm of doubles, approached Subaru and Ryuzu, Subaru presented her with her teacup.

Subaru: “You did a good job, Emilia-tan. Putting in good efforts as always.”

Emilia: “Thank you. But compared to Garfiel, I’m barely doing anything. Garfiel does such good work, ordering them all whenever it’s mealtime...”

Emilia took a sip and sighed as she looked at the doubles. The people usually looking after these girls were the representative Ryuzu, and Garfiel, the other holder of the command right. Garfiel especially was tending to the girls with exquisite care, ensuring that none of them starved to death or got stranded, grumbling about it all the way. He had had far more experience with them, for he had been interacting with them throughout his time in Sanctuary.

Though that was unlikely to console Emilia.

Subaru: “Well, just gotta take it easy. Garfiel’s doing some amazing stuff, but I think it’d be nice to have a more advanced solution.”

Emilia: “Advanced solution?”

Subaru: “I’ll tell you once Roswaal’s back. Until then, care to soothe my mind by freaking out some more in a herd of little girls?”

Emilia: “You are so mean!”

Emilia puffed out her cheeks in indignation. Adorable.

Either way, his plans were still in the draft stage and thus unready for the public. He would iron out more of the details before he revealed it, then basking in the praise.

Subaru: “Anyway, how about we leave the Ryuzu double problem for a moment, and get back on topic?”

Ryuzu: “My answer’s still the same. I’m not thinkin’ to do anythin’... much to get them movin’. I think they’re tryin’ ta keep from worryin’ me. They act like things’re goin’ reasonably well between them whenever I’m around.”

Emilia: “That is so saucy of them...”

Subaru: “Who says «saucy» anymore?”

Subaru averted his gaze to disregard Emilia's glare, and thought about the wily siblings after Ryuzu's testimony.

They were equally unwilling to make Ryuzu worry. And they had figured out how to compensate for it without actually discussing it with one another. Though they knew each other so well, they couldn't take that last step. The key reason for that had to be—

Subaru: "Yeah, it's because of their mother."

Ryuzu: "..."

Emilia: "Their mother... You mean, the one who left them behind in Sanctuary when they were little?"

Subaru: "I've only heard the second-hand story, and I haven't asked how she was like as a person. Actually no, Frederica told me she was extremely unlucky, but that's about it. I mean, I figure it's a given, but you did know her, right, Ryuzu-san?"

Ryuzu put her teacup to her lip, letting the time drag on and on. But it was not enough to escape Subaru and Emilia's focused gazes.

She let out a long sigh, and without looking at the pair—

Ryuzu: "Their mother, Reshia Tinsel, isn't a topic I particularly wanna talk about."

Subaru: "So she's someone you'd rather not remember?"

Ryuzu: "I didn't dislike her or nothing. Liked her a lot actually. She had that friendly kinda charisma, and... her circumstances were an unfortunate thing, which ya can see since the misfortune didn't kill'er. Her household ruined, and she was sold into slavery, then bandits attacked 'n destroyed the traders. Bandits took her home as their spoils, got her pregnant... It's essentially the picture of misfortune."

Subaru: "———"

Frederica had told him all this before, but it was still a horrible story. Emilia had no words for how heartrending it was. Though that final part of the tale may have eluded her understanding.

Ryuzu: “But Reshia didn’t end in misfortune. The bandits took a liking to’er so she lived ta raise her child. ‘Til another band of bandits destroyed the first one, and they entertained themselves with her again.”

Subaru: “Most people wouldn’t recover after all that.”

Ryuzu: “But she did. The bandit group collaps’d, she met Ros-bo on her travels and gained his protection, entrusted Frederica and Gar-bo to him, then left Sanctuary to search for Gar-bo’s dad.”

Subaru: “—Yeah, that’s right. Garfiel did say he thought his mother abandoned them.”

Ryuzu: “...That was probably his weakness talkin’. Since there’s hope in being abandoned.”

Subaru’s breath caught at the seemingly inappropriate word, “hope”.

Where in this tale was there any hope to be found? Before Subaru could figure it out, Emilia lowered her eyes.

Emilia: “She isn’t coming back because she abandoned us... That would mean that their mother might still be alive, is that the hope?”

Ryuzu: “...”

Emilia: “If she promised that she was leaving for a purpose, but still did not come back... It’s too frightening to think about.”

Ryuzu shook her head, looking miserable. She had told them the real reason why Garfiel and Frederica’s mother had left Sanctuary. And why had Reshia’s promise never been kept?

—The question was tied to a horrible answer. Garfiel had seen his mother’s passing. And everything made perfect sense with that.

Emilia: “I wonder if they know.”

Ryuzu: “Reshia left them after Frederica was old enough ta be self-aware. I doubt she’s forgotten it. And Gar-bo... Well, who knows.”

Emilia: “I think Garfiel remembers... No, remembered too. Otherwise, he wouldn’t look so joyful when looking at Subaru.”

It’s possible that Emilia was thinking of something other than Subaru, but he figured that the event in Garfiel’s past, his farewell to his mother, had been resolved and reached conclusion. The problem was that Frederica and Garfiel had not secured that closure equally. Frederica probably felt something very deep-rooted about the whole issue still.

It did seem like Frederica was the one avoiding Garfiel. That was the impression Subaru got when thinking back on their exchange.

Subaru: “Incidentally, do you know anything about what happened to Reshia-san after that, Ryuzu-san?”

Ryuzu: “...I never asked about it. That ain’t a lie. Sometimes, you just don’t wanna know the truth, and so it goes for me.”

Ryuzu averted her gaze, ignoring the truth she had likely already grasped. Subaru was not heartless enough to call it weakness.

A ripple crested through the dregs of tea in the teacup on the table. He watched the wave melt into nothing, a gloomy silence upon the scene.

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Subaru: “I’m feeling that if this goes on, everything will end with us prying further and further into their affairs like a couple of nosy meddlers, but what are your feelings on this, Emilia-tan?”

Emilia: “Uhhmm... I... I’d sooo rather avoid doing that.”

Subaru and Emilia left Ryuzu’s room and walked down the hall as they considered their accomplishments, terrified that they would fail to produce any decent results.

They would rather not have the situation end as just indulging in gossip and rumors. Naturally, their top priority was to improve Frederica and Garfiel’s relationship, but it was typical of life to have problems spring up while problems were already being dealt with.

Emilia: “But since neither talking to Ram or Ryuzu-san went anywhere... maybe we’re out of options? Since Roswaal isn’t back yet either.”

Subaru: “If we’re assuming that we shouldn’t rely on the passive approach of «it’ll resolve itself over time», then we can say that, yeah, the issue is probably family. But where their mom is... Or rather, whatever happened to her after their goodbye, is not the point. It’s more about their mental states back then compared to now, and the stances they held when they parted ways.”

Emilia: “Wouldn’t it be easier to just lock them in a room together?”

Subaru: “I am in shock at Emilia-tan’s unexpectedly barbaric plans.”

Subaru looked startled, but Emilia looked serious as she put her finger to her lip, prefacing with “I mean, right?”.

Emilia: “I think what they need isn’t really time, but a reason to start talking. They have thought about many things over these ten years... So if they get the time to talk about it, I’m sure they’ll manage something.”

Subaru: “Hmhmhm, but that feels passive too. It’s not really any different from the majority opinion of «it’ll resolve itself over time». When people say «it’ll resolve itself over time», they mean that the conversation you’re talking about will naturally occur during that period.”

Emilia: “So why don’t we make that conversation happen for them, unnaturally? I know my idea was pretty extreme... But I think it’s basically what Ram and Ryuzu-san are saying. We just have to leave them to it while they’re alone together.”

Emilia lifted her finger from her lip and wagged it. Subaru listened to her, his arms crossed and brows crinkled in deliberation.

Was that really all they needed to do?

Subaru did understand what she was saying. In fact, it made perfect sense. He was just troubling himself over simple anxieties.

But was it really okay for their involvement to be so shallow? Did they not have to pre-arrange things in more detail for this to work out? Nothing would hit any setbacks, and needlessly escalate in complexity?

Emilia: “Subaru.”

Subaru: “Nuh.”

—When Emilia poked Subaru in the forehead. She looked up at him, brought back to reality.

Emilia: “I know you’re a worrier, and work so hard for everybody’s sake...”

Subaru: “You’re going to make me blush, saying that...”

Emilia: “But I worry as much about you as you do for us. You need to know that you don’t have to take everything upon yourself like this. They’ll be fine.”

Subaru: “...I suppose.”

With everything dismissed by the word “worrier”, Subaru felt the weight fall from his chest. The burden in his heart had been that kind of intangible boulder— which he had shouldered upon himself.

Emilia: “It’d make me happy if you trusted me and went along with my ideas too, sometimes.”

Subaru’s shoulders untensed as he sighed.

Perhaps it was not the conclusion he had been seeking, but it seemed like events were going to end up aligning with the general consensus.

Subaru: “Okay. Then we’ll figure something out and—”

???: “—Goodness, if it isn’t Natsuki-san and Emilia-sama. What are you doing here?”

And just when he tried to adopt Emilia’s plan, someone intruded.

A grey-haired young man carrying a massive stack of papers showed up before the two. Recognizing him, Subaru put his hand to his chin in thought.

Actually, of all the important people in the mansion, there was only one they had not spoken to due to reasons other than absence. With that thought, Subaru considered how useful this man would be for tackling the problem, and nodded.

Subaru: “Okay. Then we’ll figure something out and make that happen.”

Man: “Do you mind if I ask why it feels like I don’t exist in this conversation!?”

The shout from the familiar voice echoed loudly through the Milord mansion.

One Day II Chapter 4 - The Birth of the Emilia Camp's Internal Affairs Minister

Has been cut from the Light Novel Adaptation

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by SummaryAnon — [Complete](#), Page 30

While working away at the massive mountain of paperwork, Otto listened to Subaru and Emilia who sat on the reception's sofa.

He withdrew the necessary documents from the pile, his quill pen occasionally darting over them. He scribbled formulas on a sheet of paper, performed some kind of calculation before jotting them onto the paperwork, and referenced nearby documents while stamping the first with a seal.

With how smoothly his work progressed and how frantically his eyes moved, it was questionable whether he was paying attention to Subaru, but his occasional interjections suggested he wasn't just ignoring them.

Emilia looked impressed as she watched Otto work, Subaru sitting beside her as he explained what they had been doing. He finished his speech at nearly the exact same moment that Otto returned his pen into its holder.

Otto: "So you're looking to improve sibling relations, are you...? Then if you'd like to consult me, I could tell you—"

Subaru: "Where's this going?"

Otto: "You're seeking pertinent advice from someone with siblings, correct? Then, I believe that instead of consulting this bunch solely composed of children, you'd be better off consulting me, someone who has both an elder and a younger brother, indeed."

Subaru found himself overwhelmed by Otto's abounding confidence.

Subaru had never asked about Otto's family make-up, but apparently, he was the middle brother in a series of three. So yes, Subaru and Emilia were indeed craving his advice. However,

Subaru: "But weren't you chased out of your house for being a bad son? It'd be one thing if you had good family relations, but advice from the black sheep isn't exactly helpful."

Otto: "Who are you implying was so poor a son that their parents disowned them!? I've never spoken even a single word of the like! My elder brother inherited the house, so I, as the second eldest, left to go trading of my own will! Perhaps it might be unexpected, but I do believe myself cleverer than my brothers, you see."

Subaru: "What if you're the only one thinking that, and your family's relieved the troublesome one's gone?"

Otto: "Does it somehow displease you for me to be here!?"

Otto slammed his hands on the desk, his face red. Subaru shook his head with an "Of course not". Merely the thought of Otto being absent was terrifying. It was just that Subaru had found himself insulting him before he could thank him.

Which was another one of Otto Suwen's characteristic virtues.

Emilia: "But for some reason you give off this reeeally unreliable atmosphere, Otto-kun. I wonder why that is...? Even though you did so much to help."

Otto: "E—Emilia-sama too..."

Subaru's thoughts expressed themselves vicariously through Emilia as she put her hand on her chin, in thought. Apparently, she was also a victim of Otto's virtues.

This man's aura of dependability correlated negatively with his actual capacities.

Subaru: "Look at how you're tormenting Emilia-tan, you sinful bastard."

Otto: "Utterly unjustified! What did I even do!"

Emilia: "So anyway, Otto-kun. I'd really appreciate it if you could tell us what we should do about them."

Otto: "And right into the main topic! Now aren't you two truly just master and servant!?"

Otto spent a moment overreacting, before seeming to realize that his hysterics were utterly pointless. The back of his chair squeaked as he put his hand to his grey hair.

Otto: "Well, I believe the important thing to start with would be their mutual feelings. From what I've seen, Garfiel does not look to be the problem. His stubbornness is akin to a child's, and I imagine that he'd like to reconcile as he loves his family."

Emilia: "Mm, I think so too. Garfiel wants to make up. But Frederica's having trouble approaching him."

Otto: "Frederica-san must be in a somewhat difficult position. She is the elder sibling, so as the superior she needs to let Garfiel have his way if they're to reconcile. But from what I've heard, it doesn't seem that Frederica-san has made a mistake. She may simply be exhibiting her sisterly generosity. If we consider her capacity to tolerate the younger's tantrums as the heart of this affair... what's the matter?"

Subaru stared at Otto as he neatly arranged his argument, and shook his head when Otto complained.

Subaru: "No, you hit me with an opinion that's way more serious than I expected, and I'm stuck on where to throw in jokes..."

Otto: "It's a serious matter that deserves serious consideration for a serious conclusion!"

Subaru: "Please forgive me. I'm too incompetent to play off your convoluted lead-up..."

Otto: "Are you trying to resolve problems or to stir them up!?"

Of course, Subaru wanted to resolve them, but defying his instincts hurt. Otto and Subaru's conversation aside, Emilia nodded admiringly in reply to Otto, continuing with "Then",

Emilia: "We have to address Frederica's feelings first."

Otto: "I believe so, yes. It doesn't seem that the situation will be exacerbated by Garfiel deeming Frederica-san as unforgivable. And honestly, I doubt anything so picky will be necessary for this. It's one of those problems that time can res—"

Subaru: "We don't want time to resolve it and that's why we're trying to hurry it along. Did you even listen to me all the way to the end? I swear."

Otto: "I shouldn't have to be hearing this!"

Sensing that Otto was reaching the exact same conclusion as everyone else, Subaru snorted somewhat mockingly. Otto was indignant, and Subaru pestered him further with,

Subaru: "So where would you show off that older sibling magnanimity, if it were you? You mentioned a younger brother, so surely you've had a fight where you showcased your broad-mindedness. That's the kinda tale I wanna see, hear, sing."

Otto: "If you'll pardon me on the seeing and singing, yes, a tale... Honestly, my family was rather harmonious. My siblings were good people, my parents were kind, and... Hold on, have we ever actually fought bef..."

Subaru: "Useless!!"

Otto: "Wh—why on earth are you saying that! What's so wrong about a peaceful family! Are you suggesting that relationships are illegitimate if they never involve fights even once? That's ridiculous! What is there to complain about peaceful relationships with no great flaws!"

Subaru: "Well it's the worst card you could've played in this situation!"

Just when it seemed like Otto was going to play something poignant and useful, it turned out that he did not have any cards in his hand.

Seeing as Otto could counterbalance even Subaru's ridiculousness, most likely, he had never got so enraged as to start slinging curses and insults around issues pertaining to family. Or perhaps everyone in the Suwen family shared the same bullyable temperament as Otto. A home where life had been peaceful, but only because no tormentors were around in that tentative paradise.

Subaru: "This poor, sheltered young lad..."

Otto: "It feels like you are insulting me immensely but perhaps that's just my imagination!"

Emilia: "...Huhuhu."

Otto yelled at Subaru, who let his imagination spread its wings. When Emilia, watching the exchange, put her hand to her mouth as she failed to suppress a smile.

The two men fixed their gaze on Emilia, who shook her head.

Emilia: "No, I'm sorry. It's just that you look like you're getting along reeeally well... Kind of like brothers."

Otto: "I'm rather sure that my brothers were kinder to me than this..."

Subaru: "Don't say that, big bro. We always treated you like this, brother, you just didn't realize. Face the reality, my brother¹⁹⁶."

Otto: "Oh, shut up!"

Otto had already exhausted the words and willpower needed to reply. Subaru pouted at him as he incessantly continued, "Brother mine, dear brother, broham, broski, bub-bub, broseph, Esteemed Brother My Elder¹⁹⁷", and so on. Emilia suddenly clapped her hands.

Emilia: "Ah. What do you two always do when you reconcile? I think Otto-kun always concedes, but figuring this out might bring us closer to the answer."

Subaru: "It's amazing how naturally that turned into Otto always conceding."

Emilia: "What if you try letting him win, Subaru?"

¹⁹⁶ Subaru's mocking Otto with several different ways to refer to a brother: "そんなこと言うなよ、お兄ちゃん。気付いてなかっただけで、実家でも兄貴の扱いはこんなもんだっただけ。現実を見ろよ、兄者". In order, "onii-chan" (familiar, casual), "aniki" (familiar, respectful), "anisha" (archaic, respectful).

¹⁹⁷ Subaru continues taking the piss, the original text being "お兄様、兄くん、あにい、兄や、兄チャマ、兄君様". In order, "oani-sama", "ani-kun", "anii", "ani-ya", "ani-chama", "ani-kun-sama". They are all stupid, but the last one extra super-duper so.

Subaru: "I... even supposing I yield to everyone else in the world... am absolutely never, ever yielding to Otto...!"

Otto: "Oh, shut up!"

Otto barked at Subaru's atrocious little drama, rubbing at his temples as he thought. It seemed like he was seriously considering Emilia's idea.

Otto: "Erm, what do I do when I argue with Natsuki-san, hmmm..."

Subaru: "Well, you usually cry yourself to sleep!"

Otto: "The answer didn't even bear thinking and now I'm even wondering what I'm doing!"

Otto cradled his head atop the desk as Emilia stood up and pat him consolingly. While jealous about Emilia's kindness, Subaru judged that he wouldn't be able to get it himself in this scene and slapped his lap before standing up.

Subaru: "Well, that did help. We'll try Frederica first, and depending how that goes, we'll judge how we'll enact Emilia's plan."

Otto: "You realize that you are merely fussing, and you may be breaking your back for no reason?"

Subaru: "I still think it's a lot better than actually breaking your back. Any disagreements?"

Otto: "—Haah..."

Hearing Subaru's answer, Otto let out a resigned sigh. The way his mouth relaxed into a smile was essentially his answer to the question.

Emilia must have also perceived the same thing as Subaru in Otto's expression. She stretched lightly on the spot, and flashed Otto a smile.

Emilia: "Well, Subaru and I will be going now. I'm sorry we interrupted you while you were so busy."

Otto: "No no no, I'm the one who invited you. Also, I am surrounded by mountains of suffocating paperwork. The occasional breather helps to make it easi..."

In response to Emilia's concern, Otto's expression snapped back into awareness.

Otto: "Hold on, why am I working so frantically on Margrave Mathers's feudal paperwork? At some point I got asked to assist with some municipal tasks, and then was permitted to inspect even the territory's administrative logs... I'm sure I was only trying to secure a quote for the price of that oil..."

Subaru: "Oops, Emilia-tan. We stay any longer and we'll be in the way of Otto's work. Let us vacate the premises while happily holding hands!"

Emilia: "Huh? Oh, erm, yes, let's."

Otto put his hand to his forehead, beginning to feel bewildered about his current circumstances when Subaru and Emilia abandoned him. Subaru took advantage of the moment to grab Emilia's hand and exit Otto's office. And just when Subaru attempted to flee the room, his hand on the door,

Otto: "Oh, Natsuki-san—"

Subaru: "Hm? What. Just relax. You're not sitting there because of any mistake or hypnotism or powerful suggestion. You have merely been lured by circumstances, conversational finesse, and..."

Subaru's sentence cut off halfway. He could not keep joking for he sensed something serious in Otto's gaze as he looked at Subaru. As though he was trying to talk about something important.

Subaru shut his mouth, and Emilia tilted her head. Otto looked at the two while a mere microsecond of hesitation flashed through him.

But it all dispersed once Emilia glanced back.

Otto: "—No, never mind."

Subaru: "Come on, I'm curious now. If you're gonna say something, then say it."

Otto: "I would like to talk about it, but... Well, we'll say that presently it would be like trying to hold a cloud. We'll discuss it once things begin to look more hopeful. Since I cannot tell whether it would help you or just bring you unease yet."

Otto scratched his head as he explained his hesitation.

Subaru tried to make Otto change his mind by silently staring at him, but the latter just seated himself and retrieved his quill.

Otto: "I'll be returning to my work, so I leave Garfiel to you. If the military cabinets are not functioning properly, the civil cabinets in the back will be too anxious to work."

Subaru: "—Got it. But whenever you feel like saying whatever that was, please do, Minister of Internal Affairs."

Otto: "Why of course I wi... Uh, civil, cabinet? Minister of Internal Affairs?"

Subaru: "Let's go, Emilia-tan. We'll just be bothering him if we stay any longer!"

Leaving Otto behind as he started worrying over the change in his position yet again, Subaru hurriedly pulled Emilia along by the hand and left the room.

Emilia's eyes darted about in confusion, and she glanced back at Otto the moment before the door closed.

Emilia: "Ah, um, eh, Otto-kun, good luck with your work!"

Unclear whether she was worried for him or giving him a boot in the ass, Emilia called out to Otto as she left the room.

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Having left Otto's Office, Subaru and Emilia's course of action grew more definite. Or rather, they already had a solid course before the foreign element called "Otto's opinions" butted in, and now they were moving ahead with a plan just as solid as before.

Subaru: "Thinking about it, that was a complete waste of time..."

Emilia: "Don't say that. Otto-kun's story was, erm, well, it was... Mhm, ah, erm, yes... it helped?"

Subaru: "That impossible-to-hide honesty of yours shows in that question mark, and it's adorable."

Emilia failed in her desperate attempts to back up Otto as Subaru praised her and focused on searching for Frederica.

Anyway, the problem with the siblings was the sister. Garfiel had already made up his mind, so now it was all up to giving Frederica the motivation to make up hers, then—

???: “My, if it isn’t Emily and Subaru. May I ask what you are doing?”

Subaru: “Ugh.”

Emilia: “Ah.”

A voice called from behind them. Subaru’s breath hitched awkwardly to a stop, and Emilia plainly showed her surprise as she glanced back, their gazes landing on a girl in a dress, her navy hair in a braid.

She was less than ten years old, even younger than Petra or Beatrice. She was identical to Beatrice in that she sported an extravagant dress, but hers was decorated with simpler elements than the pigtailed girl’s. Unfitting to her youth, her eyes were stern and her face dignified.

The girl’s name was Annerose Milord.

She was a child of the Milord family which was looking after Subaru’s group, currently acting as lord of the manor in the true lord’s absence, and the one receiving Subaru and the others.

While Clind and the other excellent members of the household would attend to arrangements and the like, Annerose was the one dishing out orders, and she was suitably bold in her bearing.

A statesman’s condescending bearing— but in the form of a child.

This was the Milord family of sorcerers, split from the main household of the Mathers family, which was headed by Roswaal. Annerose already was in possession of all the backbone needed to inherit this house.

Lovable childishness— was something she lacked, which was seemingly why Subaru had trouble with her. It felt like, when facing her as another individual human being, he was being far eclipsed in refinement by a girl about ten years his junior.

But regardless of all that, Emilia’s reaction was very clear.

Emilia: "Agh, Anne. How many times do I have to tell you that I'm not Emily, I'm Emilia?"

Annerose: "Why do forgive me, Emily. Though you are at fault here for hesitating in your speech when you first introduced yourself. And I find Emily an easier and cuter name than Emilia."

Emilia: "Really? I mean, I don't really mind it either, but... I guess there's no choice."

And with that, Emilia had just permitted Annerose to use this nickname.

Emilia had got along strangely well with Annerose since they first met. Ask why, and they weirdly seemed to suit each other just like that.

Annerose's sentiments seemed much like Emilia's, as she displayed not the slightest negativity around the half-elf. She could be counterbalancing it with her mental capacities, but that presented a problem in itself when considering Emilia's age.

Annerose: "Now what is it you're doing with Subaru, Emily? Having a tryst?"

Subaru: "Ah, does it look like one? Does it? Well oh dear, we've gotten so close that it looks like a tryst. You're allowed to blush when the shyness takes you, Emilia-tan."

Emilia: "No, that's not what we're doing at all. All we're doing together is some nefarious plotting."

Subaru: "You know exactly how I feel, and you just cast it aside, geez!"

Annerose looked extremely interested as she asked her question, and Emilia easily shook her head in reply. It appeared that Annerose had not been expecting especially anything, for she looked scornful at Subaru with an "I see", breathing a sigh.

Her eyes were definitely mocking Subaru's ineffectiveness. But Subaru couldn't see himself as being at fault. He had constantly been flirting at Emilia, and she had just gotten better at ignoring it.

Annerose: "I shall inquire into your nefarious schemes later, for have you seen Clind anywhere? I need him and he is utterly missing."

Emilia: "Clind-san was watching over Petra and Beatrice just a moment ago."

Annerose: "...Phrasing truly is the crux of matters, Emily."

Annerose grimaced, seeming to infer everything from that statement alone.

She had known Clind for a long time, so she had to know his disposition very well. After all, his tenacious "Loli Soul" would be usually fixed entirely on his master, Annerose. There was no need to inquire about his resilience or keenness or hopelessness.

Emilia: "He said he had bought sweets for them, so they should eat them. I wonder if he bought any for me. It's kind of reeeally bugging me."

Annerose: "...I doubt that Clind would be that impolite, so surely there are some for you. He already visited myself and presented me with tea as well."

Emilia: "Ah, did he? I'm so excited."

Emilia clasped her hands together in joy while Annerose pleasantly watched.

They were in complete opposite positions to their heights and ages. It was a heartwarming scene, but Subaru had to tilt his head.

When Annerose noticed him doing this, narrowing her blue eyes.

Annerose: "You seem to have time available, so I'm sure you would not mind. Would you care to accompany me for a request of mine?"

Subaru: "Hey now. We might look like we have free time, but we actually don't. What's actually happening with this apparent free time is that we're using this period to substantiate a definite course into doing something productive for abating future troubles which..."

Emilia: "What's your request? I don't mind so long as it's something I can help with..."

While Subaru started weaving long-winded excuses, Emilia thoughtlessly accepted instead. Annerose smiled at Emilia, looking at the pair with eyes so mature they could not conceivably be a nine-year-old's.

Annerose: "There is a man whom I would like to shock, and a maid whom I have long known that I would like to reach conciliation."

One Day II Chapter 5 - Annerose's Trap & Brother-Sister Relations

Has been cut from the Light Novel Adaptation

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by SummaryAnon — [Complete](#), Page 38

Why were they readily going along with the nefarious plots of a nine-year-old?

Subaru watched the back of the small girl leading them down the hallway, annoyed at his own failure to prevent this.

—Annerose Milord.

Being from a branch of the Mathers household that headed by Roswaal, she shared many distinct characteristics with him. Such as her notably navy hair and blue eyes. Her hair was dressed in a crown braid, but since Subaru did not know what the hairstyle was called, he mentally referred to her as Braid Loli. She possessed keen intelligence unfitting to a nine-year-old. Her cleverness and wits did make her seem like a relative of Roswaal's, but the thing most reminiscent of Roswaal showed through.

Annerose: "Emily, would you care to hold my hand?"

Emilia: "Huh? Oh, sure, Anne."

Annerose: "So I oblige. Also, Emily. Would you care to let me hug you?"

Emilia: "Huh? Oh, sure, Anne."

Annerose: "So I oblige. Also, Emily. Would you care to carry me in your ar—"

Subaru: "Enough."

Subaru got Annerose, seeking handholding and hugs and upsy-daisies, away from Emilia. Emilia's eyes widened. Annerose brushed off her lap, undeterred, before exaggeratedly patting at her shoulders where Subaru had touched her.

Annerose: "How brutishly you separate two people who so innocently desire to touch one another, Subaru."

Subaru: "Where'd you get those statistics about those two people? That questionnaire looked to be about walking the Milord estate alone to me."

Annerose: "Your limited your stature must be, Subaru, if you are unable to overlook a child's endearing mischievousness."

Subaru: "Except I would have kept my mouth shut if that was just childish mischief!"

Annerose smoothly attempted to justify her actions. Despite her words, she was still trying to grasp Emilia's hand whenever the opportunity presented itself, so Subaru couldn't get careless.

Annerose was a blood relative of Roswaal's, a prodigy beyond her nine years of age. And her idiosyncrasy was that for some reason, she liked Emilia way too much. Ever since the day that the group had arrived to stay in this mansion and they introduced themselves, Annerose had shown excessive fondness for Emilia. Emilia was a gullible airhead, so she may view it as a cute show of affection, but Subaru viewed it otherwise.

After all, she was related to Roswaal. While his status as a Demi-Human Lover had been overthrown by his actual status as an Echidna Lover, it may not be the same for his relative.

Many of the servants in the Milord household were demi-humans. Ones that Roswaal had assembled from all over his lands, ones who had apparently suffered persecution, and were effectively taking asylum in the Milord residence by Roswaal's will.

Considering that Annerose had been born and raised in this environment, demi-humans were a familiar presence for her. So, while she wasn't prejudiced against Emilia the half-elf, her friendliness was excessive.

Put simply, Subaru was trying to keep Annerose from stealing Emilia. And Annerose was trying to keep Subaru from monopolizing Emilia. Making them rivals for Emilia's affections. Although—

Emilia: "Come on, Subaru. I don't know what's rankling you, but you can't be mad at Anne like this when she's still so little. You're being immature."

Subaru: "Who says «rankling» anymore...? No, I mean, never mind that, look, Emilia-tan. Plainly said, Annerose's gaze isn't the kind you can dismiss as her still being young and..."

Emilia: "No excuses! I'm so sorry, Anne. I think Subaru's still flustered from being in someone else's mansion."

Subaru: "...and it still applies even when you act like I can't settle into unfamiliar beds!"

Subaru and Emilia had disparate stances toward Annerose, so whenever the topic veered onto how they felt about her, it turned into one of these fruitless arguments. Why couldn't Emilia notice how saccharine Annerose's gaze was?

Subaru: "I bet that it's one of those things where only people aiming for Emilia-tan's affections can notice when others are doing the same... Yes, that's definitely it!"

Annerose: "Emily. Subaru has just confessed that he lusts for you. How indecent."

Subaru: "Your word choice's the indecent thing here! Are you really a nine-year-old!?"

While Beatrice was only superficially offensive, Annerose was actually offensive. Subaru could dismiss that "indecent" as a simple riposte, supposing it had come from Beatrice's mouth, but somehow it felt like a real insult when said by Annerose.

Emilia: "How come you two can't get along? It's sooo baffling..."

Subaru: "Emilia-tan, it's because we both l..."

Emilia: "You both?"

Subaru: "—Mhm, guh."

Emilia tilted her head. Subaru could not get the rest of the sentence out.

He had stated his fondness for her countless times, but voicing it around other people made it feel cheap. And he was also saying it unintentionally while running off momentum, which made it both cheap and embarrassing.

In the corner of his eye, Annerose smiled victoriously.

Annerose: "Now then, I will refrain from teasing Subaru further. For let us speak inside my room, which we have reached."

Said Annerose, to pure Emilia and red-faced Subaru.

Abruptly, Subaru realized that they had indeed walked down the whole of the hallway, and indeed stood before an overly ornate door. It was Annerose's room. Apparently Emilia had been invited here many times before, but this was Subaru's first venture here.

Annerose took Emilia's hand and easily moved to welcome her into the room. But Subaru intervened and pulled the breaks on that.

Subaru: "Wait. «Annerose's room» is such a fishy series of words so I'm going in first."

Annerose: "—Huu. Very well, proceed. You are free to do what you wish."

While she did seem bothered at first, Annerose conceded to Subaru with a sigh. Subaru put his hand to the doorknob and, slightly tense, entered the room, where—

Clind: "I have been awaiting your presence, Natsuki-sama. Tea and biscuits have been prepared. Please do find yourself a seat and relax. Chat."

—Clind welcomed him with a formal bow

Stunned speechless, Subaru glanced back, to see that Annerose looked utterly unfazed.

Emilia: "Huh, Clind-san? But I thought you left to go eat with Beatrice and Petra?"

Clind: "So I did, Emilia-sama. However, it appeared that the Mistress found it in her mind to hold a tea party in her room, and thus, I attended to those preparations first. Urgency."

Emilia: "You're right, Anne did say something like that."

Clind: "Indeed, the Mistress so thought of me. Perceptiveness."

Emilia poked her head out from beside the frozen Subaru as she spoke with Clind. But it seemed their conversation did not quite mesh. It was almost like Clind had said "thought of me" instead of "asked of me"¹⁹⁸.

Annerose: "Attempting to rationally comprehend Clind's peculiarities shall drive you to lunacy. It is best for the mind that you simply accept it."

Clind: "I am always vigilant to remain one step ahead of my summons. Objective."

How the hell would vigilance achieve that?

That was what Subaru was thinking, but Annerose and Emilia seemed unbothered as they started taking their seats. While mentally tilting his head, Subaru joined the tea party too.

Annerose: "Seeing that Clind has prepared the tea, we may proceed with our conversation."

Clind: "The one regarding the bettering of Frederica and Garfiel-sama's relationship. Conciliation."

Subaru: "Clind-san, are you one of those butlers where there's actually several of you?"

Clind: "That position has already been filled by Ryuzu-sama. Rehash."

Clind seemed to think that his inclusion in the conversation would just stymie it. He readied tea and biscuits for everyone, before going to a corner of the room where he stood still as a statue. His gaze locked onto Annerose, but she ignored it, long used to it.

¹⁹⁸ Might be worth mentioning here that "thought" in Clind's earlier line was in brackets in the original text, possibly because it has the double meaning of "thought" and "asked" (思われました).

Annerose: "Now, Clind's assessment is correct, this regards our mutual interest in swiftly bettering Frederica and Garfiel's relationship... Would that be a valid thought?"

Emilia: "Yes, that's right. We've been racking our brains trying to do something, but we haven't really come up with any wonderful ideas. It's been a real kerfuffle."

Annerose: "You're adorable when you're stressed, Emily— Then, now that you have ventured about the mansion to discuss the issue, and found yourselves at a standstill, you have come to me."

Subaru: "Stop subliminally throwing your ulterior motives in there."

Annerose, nonchalant, looked utterly unaffected by Subaru's jab.

Either way, she seemed to understand Subaru and Emilia's situation, and so the trouble of exposing the situation was avoided.

Subaru: "But anyway, you're looking to have them make up too? What's the occasion? Everyone else just insisted to let time resolve it."

Annerose: "Perhaps because I am less inclined to resignation, and less accustomed to waiting? I must say that the people you spoke to are largely of that disposition."

Subaru: "Frank, aren't you...? No, but we also asked Otto."

Annerose: "Then I amend that to include those ignorant to success."

Subaru: "Harsh!"

And how sad Otto must be for Annerose to have managed to get this impression of him, when they had only known each other a week. But it was best that Subaru stayed silent, considering that he couldn't refute her.

Annerose: "I cannot deny that time will resolve the issue. A divide of ten years separates them, and given another decade, the issue shall resolve itself. But that is far too prolonged. Why, ten years, that's the same length of time since my Mother and Father last kissed!"

Subaru: "Huh?"

Halfway through a not-so-childlike screed, she abruptly hit a childlike conclusion.

Subaru groaned, unable to keep up with the sudden shift in gears, prompting Clind to put his finger to his mouth in request of silence.

Subaru didn't have a complete grasp of the situation, but perhaps her knowledge in those topics actually were that of a nine-year-old. Though he would rather not probe into it, since Emilia was present and also under the exact same misapprehension.

Annerose: "Care to explain that bizarre groan of yours, Subaru?"

Subaru: "It's nothing. Just some phlegm and hopelessness stuck in my throat."

Annerose: "I see. What tribulations puberty brings. Regardless, I have no intentions of making them wait for a decade."

Emilia: "We are thinking the same way. But, do you have any ideas, Anne?"

Annerose: "What were your thoughts on the issue, Emily?"

She was replying to a question with a question, but regardless Emilia furrowed her pretty brows and put her finger to her lips with a "Hmmm", in thought.

Emilia: "I think they do want to make up. I feel like Garfiel's trying to make time so they can talk, and though Frederica's uncomfortable, I think she does want to talk."

Annerose: "I see, understood. And so?"

Emilia: "And so, I've been wondering if it'd be easier to just lock them in a room together."

Subaru: "You sure are going for the barbaric plans, huh, Emilia-tan!?"

While Subaru had no better ideas, it was shocking to hear it coming from Emilia's mouth. While he did endorse the idea, there were some questions on that approach. Particularly,

Subaru: "I mean we could throw them in a room, but those two can bust out of basically any room when working together. I'd prefer we didn't destroy half the mansion doing this. So instead of a busted mansion, we have a week to get them hanging out together, what is this, a speedrun?"

Emilia: "Then what should we do, Subaru? Should I use ice to make a room that we can lock them in?"

Subaru: "I don't think we need to use such extreme conditions to revive their family love, no! Just, look! Something like, have them go into a room while sharing the exact same goal!"

Emilia: "The same goal?"

Emilia tilted her head, puzzled.

Subaru managed to get away from any criminal ideas, but his proposition did not go any further than that. He had conceived making them share a goal, but had no concrete idea what it would be. Should they defeat some monster that they can only take on together? Where were they going to find such a convenient monster, exactly?

Annerose: "In truth, my thoughts are identical to Subaru's."

Subaru: "Huh? You know where to hire Cyclopes and Chimeras?"

Annerose: "Disregard that."

Annerose gazed scornfully at Subaru, who apologized by poking out his tongue and bonking his head. The nine-year old sighed while Emilia's cheeks flushed, eyes lit with expectation.

Annerose: "We share the same thoughts on the matter of making them share a goal. But I expect that what we know about them differs, and so differs the ideas we conceive, Emily."

Emilia: "What we know about them?"

Annerose: "For you have greater knowledge of Garfiel than Frederica. While I have known Frederica for over eight years. That fanged face has been familiar to me ever since I've been aware."

Subaru somewhat understood what Annerose was trying to say.

Her relationship with Frederica meant that she could supply the information needed to fill the gaping hole that Subaru could not address— rather, the common points that could lead to a common goal between Frederica and Garfiel.

Subaru: “Are you sure this will work?”

Annerose: “Provided that I may secure helpers, yes. Now, Frederica presents no issue, but Garfiel does.”

Subaru: “Garfiel does?”

Annerose: “Should Garfiel’s personality be exactly what I have observed over this handful of days, then we should see no issues.”

Subaru did not know how intensively Annerose had paid attention to Garfiel’s attitude, but as far as he could tell, Garfiel had been entirely himself during his stay. He wasn’t being pointlessly stubborn like he had been in Sanctuary, or trying to hide his fourteen-year-old immaturity. Subaru was sure of that much.

Subaru: “Garfiel’s being entirely genuine, so no issues there.”

Annerose: “Excellent. Next is the issue of helpers... Perhaps we might enlist help from Ryuzu-san, their family.”

Subaru: “From Ryuzu-san?”

She was the person one would name first when listing people most related to them.

But she did not seem entirely cooperative, and it was unknown whether she would entertain this. Regardless, Annerose seemed to think otherwise, and gestured her butler over.

Annerose: “Clind.”

Clind: “We may delay preparations for this evening’s dinner by two hours and use the kitchen. Proposal.”

Annerose: “I see. Very well. Do inform whoever’s tending to dinner of that.”

Clind: “As you command, I swiftly shall. Haste.”

After that quick exchange, Clind silently exited the room. Subaru and Emilia watched on in surprise while Annerose took a sip of her tea, smiling.

Annerose: "Now, let us see this issue quickly done away with. For others yet remain who must be tended to."

She said, plunging Subaru and Emilia deeper into confusion.

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The second Garfiel entered the kitchen and spotted that unfamiliar stature, he sighed, recognizing that he would be caught in a trap.

Garfiel: "...Fuckin' everyone's gettin' so involved."

Despite his cursing, a slight smile was plastered on his face.

Garfiel's nose was built different. His sense of smell was so strong that it was of no comparison to the average man's, and so he had caught the scent before he had even entered the room. That he had nevertheless kept himself unaware was Garfiel's final speck of stubbornness, or perhaps his pride as a man.

???: "Garf?"

Garfiel scratched his head while the woman glanced back, and called to him in unfamiliar voice. Before him stood a woman with long, lustrous blonde hair. She was taller than him, and her build was assuredly robust. The horde of fangs decorating her mouth, combined with her powerful frame, made her seem somewhat savage and violent. Were it not for her gentle voice and the tender gleam in her eyes, people would constantly be getting the entirely wrong impression of her.

Frederica Baumann. That was how she had been introducing herself, or so Garfiel Tinsel had heard. Tinsel was the name of their mother, and Baumann that of her father.

Garfiel did not know why Frederica insisted on using her father's surname, and had opted not to think about it.

He doubted that those who had devised this meeting had also taken those complicated sentiments into account. Or perhaps Garfiel was just exaggerating the whole thing, and to outsiders it did not look like a big issue.

Garfiel: "Ain't often I see ya here, Sis."

Frederica: "And I could say the same. To think that you would find yourself here... dinner has not yet been prepared, you will find nothing here to pilfer."

Garfiel: "I ain't here for food. Stop treatin' me like a damn kid."

Frederica: "But is it not childishness to balk when treated as a child? And I suspect that you are still young enough that you would desire such babying, Garf."

Garfiel: "Nah, I'm fourteen 'n over that hump. Who the hell's a baby here!?"

Feeling pricked, Garfiel howled in rejection.

Frederica shook her head at Garfiel's overreaction and returned her gaze to her own hands—to look into the kitchen.

Frederica: "I am occupied with a task at the moment. Garf, I cannot devote all of my time to relaxation as you can."

Garfiel: "Ain't like I'm spendin' all my amazin' time playin' 'round either. And I ain't here to kill time. Think I'm here for the same reason as ya, Sis."

Frederica: "The same reason?"

Garfiel: "Looks like ya got asked by someone else tho."

By those words alone, Frederica seemed to figure it out. "So that's it", she muttered in comprehension.

Frederica: "I did think it peculiar. Out of nowhere, Annerose-sama started saying that she would die if she did not have one of my meat pies."

Garfiel: "How the hell did that manage to trick you, Sis."

Frederica: "Garf, what did they say... No, what did Grandmother say that brought you here?"

Garfiel: "She said if she ain't gettin' one of my amazin' meat pies she's gonna go more senile."

Frederica: "I also must wonder how you managed to find credibility in that statement."

To Frederica's reply, Garfiel shut his mouth. Hearing her say it did make him question it, but he had been sincerely worried, so there was nothing to do.

Garfiel: "Well maybe ya just can't understand seein' as ya gave up lookin' after her. Ain't weird at all for Granny to show up askin' if dinner's ready yet, even after she just ate. 'Course I'd fuckin' worry."

That had actually been a sad misunderstanding coming from the fact that when the Ryuzu personality would change her rotation to the next one the new Ryuzu would not inherit memories so extensively as to discern whether dinner had happened or not. But Garfiel had never noticed that and neither did Frederica.

The siblings' concern for Ryuzu's mental health increased.

However, Garfiel's statement pricked Frederica in a manner different than described. Because, although unintentionally, had slammed the issue of her decade-long absence right into her face.

Frederica: "...Indeed. I never returned to Sanctuary even once over that decade. And you are the one who protected Sanctuary during that period. I have no right to speak as if I know what happened there, or what has become of Grandmother."

Garfiel: "No, I... That ain't what I was meanin' to say with that. I was just..."

Frederica: "-----"

Frederica glanced back, forcing Garfiel to face her again. Her face remained unfamiliar.

It had been a decade. During all that time, Garfiel's mental image of his sister had remained the same ever since ten years ago. Even though he had reunited and spent some time with her, he was having trouble accepting it. And the situation was the same for Frederica. She must be viewing him with trepidation, just as he viewed her.

But it bothered Garfiel. Why was her trepidation casting waves as intense as his own? What was it that he made her feel?

Garfiel: "...Oh."

With that gaze upon him, Garfiel sighed. The answer fell into his heart with a thunk.

He got it.

Crap, he got it. He knew exactly what emotion was reflected in Frederica's eyes.

It was the same look that Ryuzu would occasionally have, back in Sanctuary. The same look that Garfiel would see on his own face, reflected upon the water.

Which meant that it was melancholy. Combined with apology.

Garfiel: "Of course it'd be."

Garfiel had assumed that the events from ten years ago had been resolved.

Back inside the Tomb, he remembered the goodbye with his mother that had happened when he was young. He now understood what his mother had felt as she left them, and that had resolved the issue for Garfiel.

He had assumed it had been equally resolved for Frederica.

But it wasn't. What happened in the Tomb affected Garfiel, and only Garfiel.

Garfiel came to understand his feelings for his sister, and his mother's love. He had never told or informed his sister of them, distant as she was.

And so, Frederica gazed at Garfiel without any resolution as to what had happened a decade prior, unsure of what to say. Even though she had matured, her gaze was identical to what it had been ten years ago.

Garfiel: "Sister.¹⁹⁹"

¹⁹⁹ Garfiel changes his usual way of referring to Frederica from "anee-touto" (姉貴) to "nee-chan" (姉ちゃん).

Frederica: “—!”

Garfiel: “I’m sorry I didn’t say anything. But it’s okay. I’m okay. I know what happened with Mom, and with you.”

Frederica: “Garf...”

Frederica’s eyes grew teary and wet in the wake of the violent emotion.

While frustrated at himself for his lack of eloquence, Garfiel searched for the words that would convey his feelings accurately. He searched his head, and all the books he had ever read, for the words he must say.

Garfiel: “I get why you left Sanctuary, and why you never came back after that... That ain’t what I can actually say but, I am tryin’ to get it. So it’s... well, y’know...”

Frederica: “You are... ready to forgive Mother?”

Garfiel: “—What’s there to forgive?”

Garfiel’s mouth relaxed into a smile as he replied to Frederica with a shake of his head.

Exactly. What was there to forgive?

The love and hatred that Garfiel had kept in his heart this whole time had been misaimed. He had known nothing of the truth, had not even known his own feelings, lashing out in anger at the impenetrable darkness— all a tantrum and nothing more.

Now that he knew the truth, it was all insignificant. There was nothing to forgive or resent.

Garfiel: “I know now that Mom loved me... that she loved us.”

Frederica: “———”

Garfiel: “So there ain’t no point tryin’ to keep away from me and what happened. Ain’t got nothin’ to do with my amazin’ self. So how ‘bout we get to talkin’ ‘bout somethin’ a lil’ less crap, Sis?”

Garfiel's speech pattern returned to normal as he rubbed his reddened nose. Frederica let a long, deep sigh out, wiping the tears from her eyes.

Frederica: "Garf... you truly have grown."

Garfiel: "Drop the sarcasm! I ain't grown a damn inch compared to ya! The hell happened to ya! How did'cha get so damn— Gaaaah!?"

Frederica: "We may be family, but that is no excuse to say such things to women, Garf. You idiot."

Frederica grabbed him by the leg and slammed him to the ground, the back of his head banging against the floor. Garfiel's eyes spun as he stared up at the ceiling, Frederica in his view above him. Her face was back to a smile.

Frederica: "Come now, stand up."

Garfiel: "Yer th'one who fuckin' flipped me over."

Garfiel took her offered hand and got back to his feet. He lightly wiped himself off and peered over at the counter that Frederica had been using.

Garfiel: "So? How far ya got with yer meat pie, Sis?"

Frederica: "I have gathered the ingredients and had just begun to chop them. Though, it impresses me that you remember how to make it, considering that you only ate it when you were young."

Garfiel: "It's 'cause some wise guy left how to make it behind so I could make it after she left. 'Kay, my amazing self'll knead the dough."

Frederica: "Then I will do the chopping."

Garfiel stood before the ingredients as he wrapped a towel around his head, prepared. Frederica brought out the cooking utensils for him as he did so, smoothly passing them over to him.

The siblings started working in side-by-side, as if there had never been a decade-long divide, as they easily attended to that familiar work together.

One Day II Chapter 6 - Just One More Left

Has been cut from the Light Novel Adaptation

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by SummaryAnon — [Complete](#), Page 49

Subaru: “But seriously, I wonder if it’ll work out...”

Emilia: “Really? But I thought our plan was reeeally good. I bet Anne and Ryuzu-san’s acting totally fooled Garfiel and Frederica.”

Subaru: “You sure...? Honestly I found Ryuzu-san’s hammy acting and Annerose’s last-second stage fright absolutely shocking.”

Annerose: “Silence yourself, Subaru.”

The three of them sat at the dining table, waiting to see how their plan had worked out, when Annerose interjected on Subaru’s musings. Her cheeks burned bright red in embarrassment, which made her look her age for once.

Annerose’s plan to remedy their sibling relations was extremely simple.

The topic was Emilia’s proposal, combined with the part that Subaru couldn’t figure out— That is, how to throw Garfiel and Frederica in the same room while sharing the same goal. And Annerose utilized a memory shared between the two of them to easily overcome the issue.

These meat pies that Frederica would occasionally cook had been her specialty ever since her time in Sanctuary. It was uncertain that Garfiel also knew how to make them, but—

Annerose: “Frederica often mentioned it. That her Grandmother had taught her how to cook this, and how she remembers that her Mother cooked it for her. Naturally, Garfiel must have also been raised on

this cooking, and I believed it highly likely that he inherited the recipe from Ryuzu-san. From what I've seen, Garfiel is something of a nanna's boy."

Subaru: "I've got nothing against all that. My issue's not with how you insightfully figured this out."

Annerose: "Hmph."

Annerose puffed out her cheeks, but Subaru would not let that erase her mistake.

They had managed to successfully catch Frederica and give her an excuse to get her in the kitchen without any problems. The issue was how they dispelled Frederica's suspicion and the motive they gave her.

Subaru: "What kind of strange affliction is that where you die instantly if without pies? Apologize to the pie."

Annerose: "It was merely a slip of the tongue. There is nothing that necessitates me to apologize to..."

Emilia: "He's right, I'm kinda unsure about that too. Okay, I'll apologize with you."

Annerose: "I—I suppose I have no choice! When Emily says so I suppose I have no choice!"

Annerose's face flashed bright red as she readily agreed with Emilia. Subaru averted his gaze from the charming yuri²⁰⁰ and looked at Ryuzu, who sat meekly at the table.

Subaru: "Ryuzu-san, looks like you're feeling some guilt that you lured Garfiel in your trap so perfectly."

Ryuzu: "Of course not... Nononono, wait! Explain that, that phrasing yer usin' to ecksacerbate my guilt. Ya quit that, that stuff pains the heart."

Subaru's mean-spirited statement did bring back some of Ryuzu's usual attitude. Then she noticed that Subaru had said what he did to energize her, and—

²⁰⁰ Slang for a girl/girl relationship with romantic undertones (or overtones, really). Can also be translated as "lilies" or "lilylily", since that's what "yuri" stands for (百合百合).

Ryuzu: “So late, after so much has happened. I’m still not sure I’m glad I did that. I do want them to reconcile, of course. But...”

Subaru: “You don’t have to worry yourself over it. They would’ve wound up the same as ever if we just left them to themselves. So the outcome stays the same. All we did was make said same outcome happen a little earlier. I think it’s best that things happen sooner when they can.”

Ryuzu: “Why’s that?”

Subaru: “Otherwise, it’s a waste of time when instead you could be having fun. Humans are certain to die, so we better take action while we still have sand in our hourglass, right?”

Ryuzu: “———”

Ryuzu’s eyes widened, and she sighed, drained of power.

Ryuzu: “Yer one of those, aren’tcha, Su-bo. A guy who doesn’t second-guess his life principles for a second.”

Subaru: “Nope, that’s not it. You barely get anyone who gets stuck second-guessing minuscule things the way I do. I just try not to overthink it by telling myself that it’s okay not to, and I’m hoping to stick to that principle.”

Ryuzu: “It’s okay, not to overthink.”

Subaru: “Yeah. We have people we want reconciled, and the reconciliation makes everyone happy. So it’s fine not to think about it too much, let’s get them reconciled. When there’s someone you wanna be with, save the worrying for later and go over to them with an «EMT»! That’s what I’ve been considering lately.”

Though of course, he could not apply that to everything.

Subaru truly was a weak person who agonized needlessly over trivial things, while having limited time and only a handful of available choices. He would at least like to remove his second-guessing about the choices he did make.

Ryuzu: “Yer right. When ya get old as me, ya’ve got so many things ta teach and ta learn it’s overwhelming. Doubt I woulda thought anything like this if I stayed in Sanctuary ‘til my end.”

Subaru: “You don’t usually get bored of being alive when you live life. But I expect everyone’s figured that one out without my input?”

Ryuzu: “Then I guess I better enjoy myself in my limited time, too. I’ll start by getting excited for my cute grandchildren ta make up, and come looking fer me ta spoil’em.”

Subaru: “Honestly, I can’t really imagine them just accepting anyone spoiling them.”

Frederica was serious to a fault, and Garfiel was a contrarian. Neither of them were going to accept their grandma’s pampering nicely. But since the two, or rather, the three, desired family love more than anything else, they all made for something quite charming.

???: “I apologize for intruding on the discussion. Rudeness.”

When the voice of a butler who silently appeared in this room whispered at Subaru’s ear. Subaru’s eyes shot open in surprise as Clind took his place to stand beside Annerose.

Annerose: “What’s happened, Clind? I will tell you that I was enjoying a blissful moment with Emily just then.”

Clind: “It pains me to so interrupt you. Heartache. However, I am required to inform that Roswaal-sama has made his return. Notice.”

Annerose: “He has? Another return from him, timed so perfectly it seems as if it was calculated...”

Her brows furrowed, Annerose muttered in dissatisfaction.

While Subaru wept silently at how even Roswaal’s relatives felt this way about his habits, Annerose stood from her seat.

Annerose: “It appears that my uncle has returned, so I shall be excusing myself to welcome him. Emily, Subaru, and Ryuzu-san, I request you relax as you wait here for the siblings to return. Particularly Emily and Subaru. You will be busy.”

Emilia: “Erm? Okay, got it. I’ll wait here.”

Emilia gave an earnest nod, and Annerose gazed at her with affection. Then she glanced to Subaru, piercing him with her gaze and negative aura. While Subaru frowned at the disparity in their treatment, Annerose exited the room with Clind. Which was when Subaru noticed the cups of tea assembled before himself, Emilia, and Ryuzu, and nearly squawked from surprise.

Subaru: “Did anyone see Clind-san set this tea?”

Emilia: “No, I didn’t. Clind-san did excellent work as always.”

Ryuzu: “Mhm, a real professional. This tea’s cooled exactly to my taste.”

Subaru: “My tea’s at the perfect temperature for me too, but how about you, Emilia-tan?”

Emilia: “I like it hot, so mine is reeeally hot.”

Subaru: “What the hell is Clind-san?”

Annerose had told him to just accept it, but Subaru was having trouble. Perhaps this was the fundamental difference between living in a parallel world, and being born and raised in one, he thought as he glanced at Emilia and Ryuzu, who also looked like they felt overwhelmed by Clind. What, so he was a deviation after all?

When,

???: “Hell, so here’s where all the masterminds’ve been lurkin’.”

A few minutes after Annerose and Clind had left, a blond tiger-man opened the door and made his entrance. It looked like he had easily noticed that Subaru and the others had been behind the trap, his expression extremely complex. Either way,

Subaru: “Looks like someone found out we’re the villains.”

Garfiel: “Can tell ya that ya got me good, I looked so frickin’ lame.”

Emilia: “How did it go, how did it go? Did you talk?”

Garfiel clicked his fangs as he walked over, when Emilia excitedly accosted him. Ryuzu tucked her head in, awkward, while listening intently for Garfiel's next words.

Garfiel looked at the two ladies, and sighed.

Garfiel: "Yeh, thank ya fer yer excessive unneeded meddlin'. Sis 'n me... Sure, we had our talk. Y'ain't gotta worry no mo'."

Emilia: "Really? Then how come you didn't come here together, holding hands?"

Garfiel: "Ya think we're capable of that embarrassin' crap! Maybe we made up, but that doesn't mean a bro 'n a sis're gonna hold hands so easy. Don't even joke."

Emilia: "But I don't think it's embarrassing, I think it's wonderful."

Emilia looked not to be teasing, but to sincerely think this, quite unfortunately. Garfiel had nothing more to say to her, as he instead looked at the hesitant Ryuzu.

Garfiel: "Granny."

Ryuzu: "...What's it, Gar-bo?"

Garfiel: "I'm sorry for makin' you worry. I'm fine now, 'n Sis's fine too. Ya don't have to worry."

Garfiel rubbed his nose as he talked, and Ryuzu fell into silence. Her mouth relaxed, and an aged smile unfitting to her youthful looks appeared on her face.

Ryuzu: "I see. That's a relief. Ya can't put too much stress on yer elders. Makes them meet their end quicker."

Garfiel: "It ain't a damn joke when ya say it, Granny, better watch out."

Ryuzu regained her casual demeanor, and Garfiel snorted.

Garfiel: "Anyway, Captain 'n also Emilia-sama, I'm sorry fer makin' ya do that."

Subaru: "Don't worry about it. Me and Emilia-tan were just killing time by improving the interpersonal relations in this mansion. Nothing that deserves an apology. Right?"

Emilia: “Subaru, you were only killing time? This was a serious issue for them, you have to take it more seriously. Hmpf!”

Subaru: “Wha!? My face-saving modesty backfired!?”

Emilia failed to notice Subaru’s roundabout consideration for Garfiel. Or so he thought, when a smile etched itself onto Emilia’s face.

Emilia: “Heehee, just kidding. I know what you’re doing. You’re not honest at all, Subaru.”

Subaru: “My god... EMK²⁰¹ strikes, and her mystique compounds... She must be trying to kill me...”

Garfiel: “The fuck did’cha just do to my apology, oy.”

Said Garfiel, stunned. Subaru and Emilia shared a glance, before facing him again and,

Both: “—We were happy to help.”

The two gave their reply to his apology.

Garfiel frowned in dissatisfaction as Ryuzu shrugged in exasperation. Subaru shots Emilia a thumbs-up as she happily watched the two.

Subaru: “Also, Garfiel. The reconciliation came first, but what happened to with the supposed trigger for the whole thing, the meat pie? Honestly I was really looking forward to it.”

Garfiel: “Ya don’t make a pie that easy. The trick’s to cook it in th’oven good ‘n slow to get that sumptuous taste. «Sumptuous enough to put a Baumbem to sleep»’s a damn good sayin’ here.”

Subaru: “The hell’s a Baumbem. Is it like a *baumkuchen*²⁰²? But I’m pretty sure if you leave a *baumkuchen* unattended for too long, it goes bad before it gets sumptuous.”

According to Garfiel, it would take two hours before the pie would be ready.

²⁰¹ Emilia-tan Maji Koakuma (エミリアたん・マジ・小悪魔), translated as “Emilia is seriously a little devil”.

²⁰² A cake from German cuisine. For more information, see [here](#).

Which meant it would coincide with normal dinnertime, and probably wind up as a dish there.

???: “—Which I must say soooooounds quite convenient.”

Having lost any way to distract himself from his hunger, Subaru redirected his attention to how to kill two hours of time— when a familiar voice spoke up.

The four glanced over to the speaker, unanimously sour-faced.

???: “Myyyyyyy goodness. I leave the mansion to attend to business, and whaaaaaaaaaat an unwelcoming hello aaaaaaaaawaits me.”

Subaru: “Not that I’m not thankful for your work. But can you please just look at this thing where we reflexively make this expression as you reaping what you sowed? Also, me and them are still being nice. Look at Garfiel, he’s gonna burst a vein.”

A vein bulged on Garfiel’s forehead as his eyes began going bloodshot.

It was the arrival of a man whose refreshed expression remained stable even before Garfiel’s glare— an identity easily deduced from his characteristic speech pattern, Roswaal L. Mathers.

Roswaal had been the mastermind behind the events in Sanctuary, and having confessed to that, had suffered a drop in amicability from basically everyone. Garfiel’s rage burned particularly hot, and it was impossible to predict when he would explode.

Subaru also felt mixed emotions about Roswaal. And after hearing the continuation to Roswaal’s confession, his uncertainty had peaked.

Subaru knew that Roswaal had not been responsible for everything that happened in Sanctuary and the mansion. For some reason, Roswaal had only revealed this information to Subaru. Subaru did not know the reason why, but he felt no urge to purposefully reveal the truth to everyone else.

The responsibility for that turmoil laid entirely on Roswaal— or at least, ninety percent of it did. The remaining ten percent was on the account of some other party.

Subaru would rather not encourage any unneeded anxiety now.

Emilia: “Subaru, are you okay? The face you’re making is reeeally weird.”

Subaru: “Seriously? What’s it look like?”

Emilia: “Hmmm, well, it’s like your eyes gweenked nastier, like this.”

Subaru: “Seriously? My face looks that cute?”

Emilia: “But it’s not cute!”

Emilia’s fingers pulled the corners of her eyes upwards as she mimicked Subaru’s expression. Even when trying to emulate something so awful, her cuteness overrode it. Such was her charm.

Emilia pouted while Garfiel seated himself in anger. Subaru watched Ryuzu prepare tea for Garfiel as he spoke to Roswaal, the only one left standing.

Subaru: “Anyway, welcome back. Did you finish what you went out to do?”

Roswaal: “Ahaaaaaa, how keenly I doooooooo feel Subaru-kun’s kindness. And yes, without issue. I visited several villages within my domain, and our new residence.”

Subaru: “Never mind the residence, you went around the territory? For what?”

Roswaal: “Beeeeeebecause of the ruckus from the territory’s Lord’s mansion buuuuuuurning down. Should I fail to demonstrate my good health, some mischief-makers may begin deeeeeeeevising plots. I make it a rule to attend thoroughly to my land’s peace aaaaaaaaand safety.”

Subaru: “Thoughts on the land’s Lord being the biggest maker of mischief devising the worst plots?”

Roswaal: “Hoooooow harsh. My citizens suffered no harm, and the villagers of Arlam are ignorant to the truth. Do you not think that this persistently thorny attitude of yours will hinder us iiiiiiiiiiin the future?”

Subaru: “Guhgigi.”

Never skipped a beat.

With that sharp jab of criticism, Roswaal regained his previous composure. If Subaru were to publicly disclose that Roswaal had been the one behind the whole affair, then it would only put them at a

disadvantage, both in regards to the Royal Selection and management of the territory. And so, even the people of Arlam Village still believed that Roswaal was a good Lord.

Only Petra, who knew the truth, held a different opinion. But she understood her current circumstances, and that the only thing to gain from revealing the truth would be self-satisfaction. Henceforth, it was doubtful that she would do anything extreme. Cleverness did occasionally force people into making cruel decisions.

Subaru: “But that does not make it fine for you utilize this to your benefit. You forget that, and once Emilia-tan’s on the throne you’re getting the guillotine.”

Roswaal: “Terrifying. Hoooooooooowever, even then I maaaaaaaay have a chance to fuuuuuuulfil my goal.”

Garfiel: “We ain’t fuckin’ talkin’ ‘bout ya meeting yer goddamn goals. Gonna make Ram cry if ya keep comin’ up with more bullshit ideas, ya bastard.”

Surprisingly, Garfiel cut in to stop Roswaal’s provocations. Roswaal’s brows shot up in surprise and he casually raised his hands.

Roswaal: “Goodness, aaaaaaaalright. I don’t paaaaaaaarticularly wish to fight with you all aaaaaaaaanyway. Why must this escalate into an argument, when I ooooooonly came here to show my return? I must find this all raaaaaaaather unproductive.”

Emilia: “It’s because you’re saying things to make Subaru and Garfiel mad. And I can tell you’re doing it on purpose. Enough of that, stop provoking people. You’re not a child.”

Roswaal: “———”

Roswaal attempted to condescendingly resolve the issue, when Emilia pressed down on him from further above, her hand to her hip. Roswaal’s eyes shot open in surprise while Emilia continued.

Emilia: “You don’t have to be so anxious, we all remember what you did and what you promised. There’s no point in acting bad on purpose and worrying everyone. You’re just so hopeless.”

Emilia sounded like she was scolding a disobedient child.

But it seemed impossible to dismiss her statements as incorrect or misplaced, and Roswaal remained silent without any rebuttals. In fact, the way he narrowed his eyes and grimaced awkwardly makes it feel like Emilia had hit the bullseye.

Though Subaru did not actually believe that Roswaal was seriously operating off such childish sentiments.

Subaru: “That really did clear the air though. As expected from Emilia-tan.”

Emilia: “—? Mhm, thank you. Also, there had to be more reasons for why you have gone around the domain besides just that. What else did you do, Roswaal?”

Roswaal: “Ahahaaaaaaa, you have grown more perceptive. I patrolled the region for reasons as stated, to demonstrate my health, and to prepare the residents of Sanctuary for their migration.”

Garfiel: “The preparations to move!”

Those words could not keep Garfiel from staying silent. Ryuzu hurriedly returned to his side as he slammed his palms on the table.

Garfiel: “That means prepping where they’re goin’, ya?”

Roswaal: “Assuredly. Their time as refugees means that Arlam Village is the best place to aaaaaaaaccept them. But there’s a limit to what the village can hold. Should their population double its original number, they will not be able to sustain themselves. They could expand the village, of course, but there’s also the problem of the barrier.”

Garfiel: “Barrier? Ya bastard, you laid more of those fuckin’ things all over the—”

Subaru: “No, hold up, Garfiel. We’re not talking about a barrier like Sanctuary’s. There’s a whole bunch of Witchbeasts lurking in the mountains around there. So there’s a barrier around the village to keep them away. That’s the one Roswaal’s talking about.”

That barrier had been what had spurred the whole Witchbeast debacle.

It was entirely unfeasible to coexist with the Witchbeasts, and being that the village needed this separation, it was difficult to expand Arlam Village.

Roswaal: “Subaru-kun explained it perfectly, thaaaaaat’s the issue. Whiiiiiiich means that the people of Sanctuary must be distributed partly to Arlam Village, and then iiiiiiindividually to other contenders. Regardless of the place that shall welcome them, they cannot stay together as people of Sanctuary infinitely. I do feel some heart-wrenching sorrow, as I watch them leeeeeeeave the nest.”

Ryuzu: “Impudence and prattle.”

Ryuzu couldn’t hold in the insults as Roswaal feigned tears. Roswaal crafted a smile and continued,

Roswaal: “Aaaaaaand so, I made a quiiiiiiick round of the territory. Though for interests of distance and time, liiiiiiii merely visited the neeeeeeeearby locations. I sent messengers to other townships, seeeeeeeing as we have an abundance of issues that need resolution.”

Subaru: “Yeah, that’s right. If you don’t get back to your office quick, Otto’s gonna die from *karoshi*²⁰³. He’ll die crushed between the weight of responsibility and work.”

Roswaal: “What a novel way to die. Veeeeeeeery intriguing.”

Subaru agreed, but did not pursue the topic.

Roswaal was back, so Ram should be livelier. That was how far Subaru had thought before he tilted his head, feeling something awry.

Emilia: “Actually, Anne said she left to welcome you, but she’s not with you?”

It seemed that Emilia had hit upon the same question. Roswaal raised his finger.

Roswaal: “That’s because I had a reeeeeeeequest for her. I was thinking to address one of those issues requiring resolution.”

Emilia: “Issues requiring resolution?”

Roswaal: “The one in the banquet hall. I believe that you have already prepared yourself for it, Emilia-sama.”

²⁰³ Translates directly to “death from overwork” (過労死). A very real problem in modern Japan.

Emilia: “—!”

Emilia’s shoulders jerked up in surprise.

But the shock only lasted an instant. Her expression immediately turned serious, and she glanced at Subaru with strong volition in her amethyst eyes.

He savored the tingle down his spine as he tilted his head, questioning. But no clear answer was given to Subaru’s query.

Emilia: “Okay. Are we starting it right now?”

Roswaal: “We can start the instant you are ready. And we still have time before the pie is done cooking. I would say that now is the perfect time for it.”

Emilia: “This is such an important thing, but doesn’t this all feel reeeally sloppy?”

Roswaal: “It’s presently difficult for us to schedule any designated times. Considering that you will be occupied from tomorrow onwards, should we not take advantage of this opportunity?”

Emilia: “Yeah. okay. I’ll do it.”

Roswaal nodded, entirely satisfied. The two of them looked to have reached an agreement, but Subaru had no idea what they were discussing. Garfiel and Ryuzu must also be in the dark.

Subaru: “Hey, stop going off agreeing to things by yourselves. What are you talking about? You better not be trying to make Emilia-tan do anything funny again.”

Roswaal: “That would be a teeeeeeeeeerrrible misunderstanding, Subaru-kun. And do relax. This issue not only involves Emilia-sama, but very much yourself aaaaaaaaas well.”

Subaru: “What do you mean I’m also invol...”

But before he could finish his sentence, Roswaal had drawn his face near. Subaru unwittingly backed away, his back hitting the wall, and Roswaal’s finger landing on his nose.

Roswaal: “—We’re discussing the ceremony for your cherished knighthood.”

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Subaru: “You know! Usually you don’t keep the details of an important event a secret from the people involved! Do people throw surprise weddings for the bride and groom? Are surprise funerals ever a thing? No, they are not.”

Having been dragged into a room to get changed, Subaru complained while taking off his track suit. The news from Roswaal in the dining room had been an absolute shock to him.

—Knighthood.

The ceremony where the master acknowledged their subordinate as their Knight, and all others recognized their change in status.

It came with extensive formalities and etiquette, which surely differed by country and by worldview. Subaru had witnessed many such ceremonies in manga and anime, but it was inconceivable that he would remember what they had in common and what diverged.

And of course, he could not be expected to know the etiquette for an accolade of the Kingdom of Lugunica.

Subaru: “Except they all went, and fucking prepared everything like that’s the obvious thing to do. Maybe that damn Annerose was jealous about how I’m all over Emilia-tan and is trying to humiliate me!”

Otto: “I’d surely think not? While naturally the star of an accolade is the knight who receives it, their master is the one obligated to inform them. If Annerose-sama acted out of such pointless stubbornness, it would humiliate not only yourself, but Emilia-sama. Do you believe that someone as clever as her would do that?”

Subaru glanced over to Otto, who was assisting with his change of clothes. You could ask how one would possibly assist with a change in clothes, but these ceremonial outfits did have various modes of dress that Subaru was unaware of.

Clind: “Natsuki-sama. The correct way to wear this requires you to begin with this undervestment and proceed with these lowers. Advice.”

Subaru: “Ah, thanks. Or rather, actually, these clothes fit me so well it’s creepy, how long has this ceremony been planned exactly?”

Clind: “It was raised in discussion instantly following your arrival in our household. And once decisions were made to hold the ceremony after Roswaal-sama’s return... I assure you that Emilia-sama has studied and rehearsed the ceremony thoroughly. Report.”

Subaru: “That report’s late! And why was Emilia-tan keeping it a secret too!?”

Otto: “Perhaps because it would be awkward? Anyway, you truly do not know a single step of the process...? That would present something of a problem...”

Subaru put his arms through the sleeves of the clothes that Clind had handed to him, lost on what to do. Otto perceived Subaru’s genuine discomposure, and looked as if he had started noticing the obstacles impeding this ceremony.

Subaru: “Right? It’s doomed. I’m glad Emilia-tan feels this way, and it’s crazy how honored I am to receive a knighthood, but we’re screwed if this ceremony fizzles out, aren’t we? Yeah, okay, I better get on my hands and knees and beg for this to be postpo—”

???: “Ya step forward when called and kneel before Emilia-sama. Then ya draw yer sword from its scabbard and pass it to her. Emilia-sama takes the sword and puts it to yer neck, she speaks the oath... then you accept the oath in return. Thassall.”

Subaru: “...What, seriously?”

Muttered Subaru in shock. Everyone in the room gazed at Garfiel, who crossed his arms.

Garfiel: “What. Ya don’t believe me?”

Subaru: “It’s not that, it’s that I’m shocked that you know this. How out of character is it for you to be versed in formal events like this...?”

Garfiel: “No, Captain. It ain’t that I know anythin’ ‘bout formal events.”

Garfiel waved his hand in astonishment, but that did not eliminate the fact that he had just outlined the formal process of an accolade. Subaru furrowed his brows questioningly, and,

Garfiel: “It’s just that knighthoods’re awesome so I memorized it.”

Subaru: “Oh, okay. Got it.”

The reasoning was so convincing that Subaru instantly agreed with it.

His mighty *chuuni*²⁰⁴ mind offered assistance even here. Of course Garfiel would know about accolades. Such was the persuasiveness of this argument.

Otto: “Does that account align with your knowledge, Clind-san?”

Clind: “I am only scantily versed in the topic, but my knowledge does coincide with what I heard. I bow my head before Garfiel-sama’s mastery. Succinct.”

Otto: “But that makes it sound as though you also know the procedure... No, never mind. Disregard that comment.”

Otto’s way of life was one of opening cans of worms to find demons inside. Nobody who had witnessed the mysterious gleam in Clind’s monocled eye would criticize Otto for his retreat.

Either way, Subaru smoothed out the wrinkles of his clothes, put on his jacket, and started adorning it with the required ornamentations.

Subaru: “This outfit’s crazy. It took me ages to get used to the butler uniform, but I don’t think I’ll ever own this look.”

Otto: “You won’t be granted enough opportunities to wear it that you could say that you own it. It would be another case, were you entering nobility... Though, I suppose it’s still unclear what your future will bring.”

Subaru: “Meaning?”

²⁰⁴ “Chuuni”, also known as “chuunibyou” (中二病), or literally translated as “middle two disease” or, alternatively, “middle-school second-year disease”. Well-known term to describe kids in middle school who have delusions of grandeur, like special powers. It even has its own [Wikipedia page](#)!

Otto: "Emilia-sama is on the social ladder. As long as you follow her, I suspect you will attend more than a few events in this vein. This outfit was specifically tailored, after all."

While feeling admiration for Otto's piece, thoughts of the future depressed Subaru. He imagined these formal events, and his heart shivered, inept as he was at remaining stoic. Though these worries were only to be had if he got safely through this upcoming ceremony.

Subaru: "Goddamn Roswaal, bet he hid it on purpose to make a laughingstock of me..."

Garfiel: "Sulkin' ain't gonna help ya none, Captain. Now repeat what my amazin' self said to make sure ya don't forget it."

Subaru: "I kneel, draw the sword from its scabbard, give it to her, and say the oath. I mean, I've gone through two graduation ceremonies; I can at least memorize this much."

Except he had attended those ceremonies after properly practicing them.

Subaru: "I know this comes late, but if this is an accolade then all the Royal Knights must've done it."

Otto: "Not only the Royal Knights, but everyone who holds the title of Knight. Though I do believe it is rare to disregard all these requirements and pledge directly to a master. Usually, you would swear fealty to the nation before selecting a master."

Subaru: "So it's the difference between serving the country and serving an individual. I think it's right to be serving an individual."

Either way, he could say "I am a Knight", but it wouldn't feel real.

Subaru had proclaimed himself as Emilia's knight multiple times. Insisted it. Even though he knew his false title was going to gain legitimacy, he couldn't exactly accept it. He also questioned how exactly being recognized as a Knight would change him, too.

Subaru: "All this after you dressed me in these formal clothes. For real, this fits me perfectly, when did you take my measurements?"

Clind: "Measured daily, interspersed between breaks in your awareness. I had already confirmed that it fit, but it elates me to see you dressing. Splendiferous."

Subaru: “I’m unsurprised about the measurements, but when did you check the fit? Have I somehow been dressed in this outfit before?”

Clind gave no reply as he smiled, and brought Subaru, who had finished dressing, over to a mirror. As Subaru stood reflected in the full-length mirror, his breathing stopped.

He wore a black ceremonial outfit that clearly exceeded his standing, opulently but not outrageously decorated. No matter how Subaru posed, the captivating clothes made it look good. And when he carried himself soberly, indeed, it was an outfit fit for formal ceremonies.

But, yeah, it definitely felt like Subaru was inferior to that clothing. Something felt off, like he was attending *Shichi-Go-San*²⁰⁵, or something. Nevertheless—

Otto: “Mm. It looks better on you than I expected.”

Garfiel: “Does feel like the clothes’re wearin’ you, but they ain’t totally defeated ya. Relax, Captain.”

Clind: “Indeed, it suits you well. Emilia-sama’s impression of you shall surely climb to even greater heights. Amicability rising.”

Subaru: “You sincerely think that? You all sincerely honestly think that?”

Subaru readjusted his collar time upon time as he glanced suspiciously at Otto, who despite his frankness, had failed to mock Subaru’s appearance. But Otto’s expression remained perfectly stable, and he gazed at Subaru with pride. Not even Subaru could possibly reply to that.

Garfiel: “Here, take this, Captain.”

No amount of fiddling would invite any dramatic change.

Subaru sighed as he turned around, and Garfiel handed him his knight’s blade in support. Subaru reflexively accepted it, when the slender thing made him swallow his breath.

²⁰⁵ A traditional rite of passage in Japan for three- and seven-year-old girls, as well as five-year-old boys, held on November 15. For more information, see [here](#).

Clind: "It would be best that you used your own favored blade, but being that you possess none, our household has provided this. You may keep it should you so fancy. Gift."

Subaru: "A Knight's sword... huh. And it's real, naturally?"

Otto: "I doubt you would ever find a wooden sword with such excellent craftsmanship. Only a child would find joy in something like tha— Hm? Am I sensing a new business opportunity...?"

While witnessing the potential birth of wooden swords in parallel world souvenir shops, Subaru felt the weight of the sword in his hands.

This was not his first time holding a sword.

Last time had been during the Witchbeast affair in Arlam Village, when he ventured into the mountains with Ram to search for Rem. He accepted a sword from the village's Men's Brigade, wielding the thing with barely any thought.

The sword went on to break before he could use it to fight any Witchbeasts, so while it did not manage to a deciding factor, it did provide Subaru with his first experience in stabbing a living creature with a blade, which he had never done since.

This knight's blade should be thinner and lighter than that previous one. But the weight he currently felt in his hands was beyond compare.

Subaru: "——"

He unconsciously clicked his throat, a constricting feeling in his chest. The weight from that sword and this sword were entirely different.

And Subaru knew that the entire purpose of this ceremony was to recognize that fact.

Otto: "—Natsuki-san. I will come and call you before it begins. I will perform the final inspection of your dress then, so please make sure to keep it orderly."

Subaru: "...Understood."

Otto must have seen the shift in Subaru's expression, and sensed how he was beginning to properly face the ceremony.

With those words, he and the others left the room.

Subaru: "-----"

Left by himself in the room, Subaru dragged over a nearby chair and seated himself before the mirror. With the sword in his hands and his visage in the mirror, he submerged himself in thought.

Knight. The weight of the title pressed down on Subaru's shoulders.

Had Subaru ever seriously considered the significance of this word he had so frivolously used? Naturally, he had been entirely serious back then. He would not use this as armor to conceal his rashness in proclaiming himself as Emilia's knight. However---

Subaru: "Julius, Reinhard."

Subaru thought of the upper echelon of Knights in the country. One was the Knight of Knights. One was the Finest of Knights. They were the pride of knighthood, and the emblem of anything knightly.

Back when Subaru called himself a knight, ignorant to those facts, Julius sternly beat the truth into him.

Subaru: "What a Knight needs is both power and fealty... I think was it."

If those were the requirements, then Subaru was still unfit to be a knight.

Subaru's feelings for Emilia were nothing as majestic as fealty. He was incapable on his own, and failed to meet average capabilities even with Beatrice's help. Both his power and his fealty were as insufficient as ever.

But now he had the will that he had previously lacked. It was not fealty, but it was comparably strong.

He might be lacking power, but he had the spirit and resolve to compensate for what he lacked. He couldn't change that it seemed too awkward for him to be called a Knight, but that was what made him Subaru. Like hell Natsuki Subaru was suited to anything so magnificent as chivalry.

???: “What. Seems that I didn’t need to visit after all, in fact.”

It happened as Subaru faced himself in the mirror, having resolved one point.

He saw a small silhouette standing beside him, hunched forward like he was. The girl reflected aside him in the mirror, with her long, extravagant pigtails, was Beatrice.

Subaru: “I’m getting dressed. You dirty loli.”

Beatrice: “You’re already dressed, I suppose. I was asked to come here to do something since you looked so persistently uncertain, in fact. So I had to come here to give you a slap on the back, I suppose—— But it seems that I didn’t need to, in fact.”

Subaru: “Those guys...”

Who had been the meddler here? Otto? Garfiel? Perhaps even Clind? Or maybe it had been all of them, and Subaru had to smile bitterly at how likely that was.

Indeed. There was no one more suited to give Subaru a pep talk at this moment than Beatrice. She was the best choice. So he would indulge himself on her care, and accordingly uplift Beatrice’s expression, as she regretted the needlessness of her presence here.

Subaru: “My back.”

Beatrice: “...?”

Subaru: “If you’re gonna slap me, then please do it. I do feel like I’ve sorted some things out... but I’m still looking for that final push.”

Beatrice’s eyes widened in shock. Her expression was so incredibly darling that Subaru had to keep himself from chuckling.

Subaru: “Come on, please.”

Beatrice: “You don’t have to worry yourself... I know I’m not worried myself, I suppose.”

Subaru: "I'm not saying this out of worry. I just think that, no matter who gives you that slap on the back, that ends up being the final push. So if I'm the one who choose who that person will be, then I want it to be you."

Beatrice: "-----"

Subaru: "I want you to slap me on the back and be the final strength I need to be Emilia's Knight. It feels more like me that way."

He could just be saying it for peace of mind, but what was so bad about peace of mind? Perhaps it was just an issue of how he was feeling. But that just made it more legitimate; of course he should have her make him feel better, then.

Because the heart would always express itself with the simplest language.

Beatrice: "Y—you hopeless fool, in fact. You'd be absolutely lost without Betty, I suppose."

Subaru: "Yeah, I would. I'm utterly useless without you. And when I'm with you I'm normally useless."

Beatrice: "Which means you're still useless, in fact! Sheer discourtesy, I suppose!"

Subaru: "And now this useless fool's gonna be Emilia's Knight and gradually stop being so useless. So whenever I do start bordering on being useless, I'm putting my hopes on you to correct."

Subaru lifted himself from the chair and pat Beatrice's head.

Beatrice looked dissatisfied with his vigorous manhandling, but made no motion to stop him, and voiced not a single complaint.

Subaru: "-----"

After sating himself with Beatrice pats, Subaru slowly turned to present her his back. And surely she understood what it meant.

She took a faint breath, readying herself.

Beatrice: "—Hiyaah, in fact!"

Subaru: “———!”

With an adorable shout, the noise of her palm echoed through the room. The impact from her small hand stung more than Subaru had expected. And an even greater shock ran from his back into his whole body.

Subaru: “Man, you’re surprisingly strong.”

Beatrice: “I didn’t walk around carrying big, heavy books every day for nothing, I suppose.”

Beatrice’s bragging made him think back on her time in the Library. Why yes, Beatrice had always been reading books massive enough to conceal her small frame. Today was where she would showcase the effects of constantly bearing all that weight.

Though he didn’t know if muscle workouts actually did anything for Spirits.

Subaru: “So we’ve unexpectedly uncovered a muscle magician. Big Beako²⁰⁶.”

Beatrice: “I suspect you just used an incredibly terrible epithet on me, in fact.”

Subaru: “Just your imagination. And man, that fired me up. Thanks.”

Beatrice: “...You’re my Contractor, so of course I would do this, I suppose.”

Blushing slightly, Beatrice averted her gaze from Subaru. It made him want to pat her again. But before he could reach out to her——

Clind: “——Natsuki-sama, the time is near. Preparations.”

——Clind knocked on the door and peered in, summoning him. With the seconds looming in closer, he gulped from the tension. But his limbs and face felt less rigid than he had expected. The pent-up tension loosened him up in a good way, and he quietly sang the praises of Beatrice’s unexpectedly effective slap.

Clind: “A seat has been prepared for you as well, Beatrice-sama. As I shall also be humbly attending, I would hold the greatest of appreciation supposing that you may accept my presence. Understanding.”

²⁰⁶ https://youtu.be/U8K_0tZoibQ. If you know, you know. Is spoilerless.

Subaru: “Okay, got it. Please don’t laugh if I mess up.”

Clind: “As you command. Solemnity.”

Clind awaited outside the door to escort Subaru, who sighed and clicked his neck. He glanced back to Beatrice, unsure of what to say.

Subaru: “Well, I’m off.”

Beatrice: “As you should be, in fact.”

It was a simple exchange, but it was enough. Her words and actions had already given him more than enough.

Beatrice: “—Subaru.”

But at the very end of the end, Beatrice halted Subaru one last time. Just before he left the room, Subaru glanced back to a red-faced Beatrice.

Beatrice: “That outfit looks great on you, I suppose.”

And with that, she supplied him with the last bit of confidence he needed.

One Day II Final Chapter - Nonsense Dance Under the Moonlight

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 15, Ending Chapter “Offbeat Steps Under the Moonlight”, Parts
1-3

Original Web Novel Chapter – [Complete](#)

Original Translation by SummaryAnon – [Complete](#), Page 66

—Subaru had been in this hall before, but it looked nothing like how he remembered it.

Candelabra lined the red carpet. The flickering of their crimson flames submerged the room in further formality, prompting everyone in attendance to straighten their posture.

Almost all the important people of the mansion stood evenly by the wall. Which meant not only the main players, but also some attendants from the Milord household were in presence.

Assembling only people relevant to Subaru meant monopolizing the assembly with his in-group. Even he understood that many more people must play witness to this event. But, having said that, should they truly have brought all the Ryuzu doubles along?

Ryuzu nodded at him, telling him not to worry about it, but of course it was going to bear on his mind. Although he knew that the girls were harmless unless directed, the uncertainty over what they might possibly do unsettled him.

Though, everyone else shared that same anxiety, but regarding Subaru instead.

There were so many points worthy of ridicule among the people here. All the main players were primly dressed in formalwear, which was hilarious.

Disregarding Roswaal and Annerose, who seemed used to their outfits— Otto and Garfiel looked even more awkward in their getups than Subaru. And ignoring how Garfiel's face was jumbled up in a scowl, irked by his stuffy collar, Otto had not even noticed how blatantly awkward he looked. Guy's a riot.

The servants included Frederica and Clind, who were always in formalwear. Subaru did have some qualms about Ram, who stood with them in her maid outfit as if it was entirely reasonable. But once he saw what was beside her, his breath hitched.

A blue-haired girl, seated in a chair.

Her eyes were closed. Naturally. She was still asleep. Subaru resented how considerate Ram had been to bring her here, and have her attend the ceremony. Subaru resented how Ram smirked at him, announcing that she had been the one who had proposed it.

Subaru looked further along to find Petra gazing at him, finely dressed much like he was, with pride. Her dress amplified her splendor, and she shone brightly enough to match Annerose and Beatrice. She was meant to be a simple village girl, so how would you even explain her composure?

Beatrice wore the same outfit as always, but her expression towards Subaru was gentle. Her flushed cheeks reminded him of their exchange in the dressing room, which made embarrassment rise in Subaru as well.

And standing before him—

Subaru: “———”

—Was a silver-haired girl, waiting for Subaru. In her ceremonial outfit, Emilia enchanted Subaru with a completely new kind of brilliance.

Her silver hair shimmered like moonlight, and her amethyst eyes glimmered like jewels. Her face was tantalizingly beautiful as she pursed her lips, apparently tense about this vital ceremony. The outfit amplified the purity that Subaru usually felt in Emilia, hallowed as a priestess' dressing, lined with sublime gold that burned the nobility and seriousness of this ritual into one's consciousness.

The instant that Subaru sighted her, everything in his head fell hush. The last vestiges of his bubbling emotions dispersed, and everything except Emilia disappeared from his mind.

He was absolutely not going to make a mockery of this ceremony, or the people watching.

What did he need to do? Who did he need to be looking at? Where did his heart lay? There was no need to tell him. He already knew.

Subaru: “-----”

Nobody instructed him; his feet took the step forward. His footsteps made no sound upon the rich carpet. He forgot the weight of the knightly blade at his hip, focused with passion holding him aloft, but calm as a resting sea, as he approached Emilia.

Even through the storm of onlooking gazes, his heart remained unshakable. The only thing to cast ripples in Subaru’s heart, in this instant, was Emilia.

He drew near to her, close enough to touch her.

She stood on a dais, her tantalizingly beautiful cheeks rigid. Subaru knelt before her. With his knee to the ground, he bowed his head. All the ceremonial customs that Garfiel had relayed to him took instant command of his body. He kept his eyes closed as her intense gaze stared down at him.

He could almost forget to breathe in this atmosphere. Pleasant stress played on his skin as he looked up, and he took the sword from his waist. He reverently lifted the weighty blade, unsheathing it horizontally before his chest.

Light from the candles washed over the steel, lighting Subaru and Emilia’s eyes equally bright.

Subaru: “-----”

Emilia: “-----”

The beauty of the unsheathed blade burned itself into Subaru’s eyes as he presented it to Emilia. She witnessed the sword cast before her. Her lips trembled with some form of sentiment.

But she instantly asserted control over the words before they could spill, and she held herself firm beneath the surge of emotion. Her pale fingers touched the sword. She slowly lifted the heavy thing, until its tip pointed towards the ceiling.



Illustration from Volume 15, coloring by Setowi ([source](#))

Emilia was beautiful as she held the sword aloft. Subaru restrained his desires to witness the sight, bowing his head, and closing his eyes.

What was presented to Emilia was the sword, the pride of the Knight, alongside his being and his neck, which are those of the Knight.

Subaru: “———”

Emilia: “———”

A Knight devoted their life to their Master.

Subaru’s posture illustrated this devotion, making Emilia’s lips and eyes waver. But her hesitation only lasted a moment. Her pursed lips and focused gaze carried not the slightest indecision.

The point of the sword descended upon Subaru’s left shoulder. She rested the flat of the blade on his shoulders, and its weight was enough to almost make him cry out. The pressure bearing on him was nothing physical, but mental.

Perhaps this sensation was the one that every Knight must bear, that thing called “pride”. In this exact instant, Natsuki Subaru finally understood it.

The point of the blade moved to his right shoulder. He felt the weight identically, but the coolness of the blade remained with him this time. Of course. This was when the ceremony’s most important moment would begin.

Subaru: “———”

Emilia: “———”

Silence fell upon the hall.

No. The hall had been silent so far. The silence until now had been steeped in a strange tension, ardent and loud.

But the silence in this instant carried a new flame.

Absent of tension, absent of zeal, absent of anything, this silence was legitimate.

A quiet that fell equally upon the heart of Emilia, of Subaru, of everyone in attendance. Only one person had been granted the right to shatter it.

Emilia: “—To the sun that gazes over the radiant world, to the stars that watch the realm in its slumber. To the winds, to the waters, to the earth, to the light, to the Spirits residing in everything.”

The silence shattered.

Emilia’s lips sung the ceremonial rite.

Emilia: “—To the grand world that received you, that nurtured you, that delivered you.”

Trembling. His heart was trembling.

His teeth did not feel to sit right. What was his heart having trouble with? It irritated him to even question his mental turmoil. All he wanted to do in this moment was to drown himself in the chime of that bell.

Emilia: “—To the pride that supports you, that you built, that you fostered.”

He felt the heat in the gaze upon him compound. The passion burning inside him was ready to combust.

His heart thumped wildly, maniacally, as he regardless waited for the question.

Emilia: “—To everything that watches over you, to the world that raised you, to the pride that supports you, let your way cast no shame. Without fear, without dread, without doubt, be true as you are in your heart.”

The rite ended. The question was coming.

It would end the ceremony. Not even Subaru knew the answer to this question. However,

Emilia: “—With your will always strong, and as everything that surrounds you does, will you swear to protect me from this moment forth?”

—His heart did know how to answer Emilia’s question.

Subaru: “To the sun, to the stars, to the world, to my pride— and...”

He would announce his gratitude and determination to everything that had been stated in the rites. Before he made the pledge, he thought of people who he assuredly must thank.

And so, the words flowed naturally from his lips.

Subaru: “—To my mother and my father, I swear.”

Emilia: “——”

Subaru: “I will protect you. I will realize your wishes— My name is Natsuki Subaru.”

He raised his head.

The sword remained at his right cheek. But its gleam failed to catch his eye. The only thing he saw was that brilliant amethyst, gazing back at him.

Subaru: “Emilia. I am your only knight.”

Emilia: “—Mhm.”

He said the words, and she voiced her answer. Emilia’s eyes flooded with emotion.

But she managed to keep anything from spilling as she lifted the sword from Subaru’s shoulder. She fixed its alignment and presented it back to him.

He respectfully accepted it in both his hands, and sheathed it in its scabbard. Subaru returned the blade to his hip as he looked up at Emilia, still kneeling.

He saw Emilia give a slight nod, and stood up. And then,

Subaru: “I’m late in saying this, but Emilia-tan, you look mega sexycute in that outfit.”

Emilia: “You dummy.”

—Shattering the majesty of the ceremony, Emilia poked out her tongue, red-faced.

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Many dishes lined the table in the banquet hall.

Social standing and class presented no issue as everyone present at the accolade chatted with each other, turning the buffet into something of a get-together.

Subaru: “I just went through one of the most stressful things of my life, and look at you, having all the fun.”

He watched the banquet from the terrace outside, bathed in the night wind. A plate of food from the table and a drink rested on the nearby railing, but the swell from before had yet to pass.

He was having trouble getting any food or drink down his throat.

The hot flush from his neck upwards wasn’t going away.

His stomach told him that he was hungry, but his chest was too full for anything to get through.

Subaru: “———”

In the corner of his eye, he saw Petra dancing at the head of the hall in her dress. It was the kind of dance being done in festivals taking place in Arlam Village, but with Petra’s take on it, and with her proficiency, it was certainly fit for a noble’s mansion.

She pulled a blushing Beatrice along with her, forcing her into a shoddy dance. Though she tried desperately to stay apathetic and expressionless, Subaru spotted how her ears and nose trembled, unable to hold it in.

As always, it was Petra dragging helpless little Beatrice into it.

Subaru’s cheeks relaxed as he took his glass. He had managed to secure enough composure to at least wet his tongue. Though, he was not ready to reach for Garfiel and Frederica’s pie just yet.

???: “—There you are, Subaru.”

Subaru leaned on the bannister, staring up at the sky, when a voice called him. He looked down to find a moon pixie, her beauty only embellished beneath its light.

Subaru: “Oh no, wait, it’s Emilia-tan. Thought it was an angel.”

Emilia: “You’re saying weird stuff again. Are you drunk?”

Subaru: “I’m still underage so no, I’m not drinking. If I’m drunk on anything, then it’s on the atmosphere and my own ego.”

Emilia: “See, so you are drunk.”

Emilia giggled, and Subaru had to furrow his brows at that.

He saw her pale skin peeking out from beneath her neat dress—and the flush on her neck and cheeks, which made him reach an opinion on her current state.

Subaru: “The heck, Emilia-tan. You go asking me if I’m drunk, when it looks like you’re who’s been drinking.”

Emilia: “I haven’t been drinking. They just gave me some punch. I never drink alcohol and go all weird and funny.”

Subaru: “Man, you’re cute.”

Emilia pouted, completely forgetting the seriousness of the ceremony. Meaning that this right here was just a completely normal adorable girl.

Emilia: “So, Subaru. What are you doing alone out here?”

Subaru: “Well, I already told you. I’m drunk on the atmosphere and my ego.”

It was a frivolous reply, but not a completely inaccurate one, either. What was there to call this but going out into the night alone, moping, unable to vent? Not that he could divulge his feelings to anyone so easily.

Emilia: “Do you regret it...?”

Subaru: “Absolutely not. Gonna be hearing none of that, Emilia.”

Emilia: “Mhm, I’m sorry for that. Sorry. But I’m happy too.”

Her cheeks still flushed from alcohol, Emilia took a step closer to Subaru.

She leaned on the bannister beside him. Their shoulders were close enough to touch, and even with clothes between them, Subaru’s body flared hotter.

Emilia: “Subaru. I apologize that the accolade came out of nowhere. I was ready the whole time, so I thought you knew about it too.”

Subaru: “No, I’m probably just an idiot for not realizing. Thinking back, you did keep asking me if I had practiced, but I just came up with bullshit answers to brush it off every time.”

Emilia had assumed that Subaru was aware, and had been regularly checking on his progress. Subaru had simply never realized it, getting through the conversations with frivolities as they came, never understanding what Emilia had been trying to say, while devoting himself to other things.

And besides, this whole accolade thing was—

Subaru: “That bastard Roswaal’s fault. Actually, almost everything’s been his fault lately. Is he trying to humiliate me? He’s been going seriously overboard this last while.”

Emilia: “I kinda think Roswaal’s always been like that... But, yes, it does feel like he’s been provoking you more than he used to. Maybe he wants your attention.”

Subaru: “That’s a terrifying thought, Emilia-tan.”

Subaru’s attention would only make Roswaal an even more hopeless person, so he would rather not have that. Subaru grimaced at the surprisingly possible idea, and Emilia laughed, waving her hand easily.

Emilia: “I’m just joking. I think Roswaal doesn’t know how he should act now that we know about his plotting. I’m sure that, in a bit, he’ll go back to being like before.”

Subaru: “Going back to «being like before» sounds like he wouldn’t have learned anything at all, but... Well, it’s better than him changing on us and leaving us lost on how to respond.”

It might seem like a half-hearted decision, but Subaru would agree with it for now.

With that part of the conversation over, Emilia took a sip from her glass. She had it with her the entire time, and if Subaru's guess was correct, then it was the alcoholic kind of punch.

It felt like Emilia was getting more intoxicated, which both scared and interested him.

Emilia: "Say, Subaru."

Subaru: "Hm, what? The alcohol's heating you up so it's time to get undressed? Sure, but better not do it here. Okay, let's find somewhere else. Off we go."

Emilia: "Sorry. I'm not entirely sure what you're saying. No, we're staying here."

Emilia shot Subaru a slight glare. It made him shrink back and lower his head, when she jerked her chin towards the banquet hall.

Emilia: "They look like they're having fun."

Subaru: "Yeeeeeah, they do. It's a noble mansion but even the servants are welcome, feels really cozy. As a member of the lower-middle class peasantry, I'd say it's basically the ideal sight."

Emilia: "Mhm, I agree. I think it's reeeally wonderful."

Subaru noticed the affection and desire in her amethyst eyes.

It was possible that Subaru and Emilia were not witnessing the same picture. Emilia was surely seeing a peaceful scene, absent of any class-based or race-based discrimination, while Subaru only perceived the superficial layer of things. Their viewpoints differed completely.

They were seeing the same thing, but thought differently. And Subaru believed that discrepancy was fine.

Emilia: "What's going on, Subaru? You look reeeally gentle."

Subaru: "I wonder. Maybe I'm just happy that I'm here, seeing the same things as you, Emilia-tan."

Emilia: "Really? Then I'm happy that you're seeing things the same way."

Subaru: “I don’t know. I might not be. But I think it’s alright for us to differ.”

Emilia glanced at Subaru. He felt her gaze but kept looking straight ahead, his cheeks relaxing into a slight smile. Emilia noticed him smiling, and nodded.

But something happened right when they reach their understanding—

Subaru: “Oh, goddamn Otto. He’s overdoing it, I doubt he can even hold his liquor.”

In the middle of the hall, Garfiel had challenged Otto to drink a full glass of expensive-looking alcohol in one go. Otto slammed the glass back down to the table, having beautifully chugged the whole thing, to the applause of the onlooking crowd.

But Otto’s face flushed bright red before swiftly paling dead white. Following that change in colors worthy of a traffic light, Garfiel immediately carried Otto and rushed out of the hall.

Subaru: “Guess they’re going to the toilet.”

Emilia: “Will Otto-kun be okay? Um, he kinda looked like how the dogs in the forest do when they eat poison mushrooms, just now...”

Subaru: “You should know what’s up as an adult, now that you’ve drunk yourself to your limit, Emilia-tan.”

Emilia: “Is that how it works?”

Subaru: “No, I mean, I don’t know.”

He was underage.

And how expensive had that liquor that Otto just drank been, and was probably regurgitating as they spoke? Subaru had doubts that anything cheap or mass-produced was going to be included in this banquet.

Subaru shot Roswaal a glance. Perceptive as he was, Roswaal caught the look and raised his glass to Subaru. The Margrave in his clown make-up easily ingested the same alcohol that had defeated Otto. Either his dignity was winning, or he was just used to the liquor.

Emilia: "...Subaru. I want to tell you something."

Subaru: "What a coincidence. I want you to tell me something too."

Breaking the silence that had fallen between them, Emilia whispered quietly enough to Subaru that only he would hear. He nodded, and while still leaning on the railing, adjusted his posture.

Emilia turned to face him too, leaving them gazing at each other within breathing range. Subaru reflexively stepped backwards, but—

Emilia: "No running."

Emilia's hand grabbed him, stopping his retreat.

The step he had taken winded up as a half-step, putting them even closer than before. Subaru stumbled forward and bumped onto Emilia's forehead. He hurriedly tried to draw back, but Emilia's grip on his ceremonial dress prevented him.

Subaru: "E—Emilia-tan? I'm happy about this situation but, it's kinda a little tense for a conversation..."

Emilia: "I'm tense too. This is my first time having such an important talk with anyone. So, we're even."

Subaru: "N—no, I think I'm winning here..."

He desperately tried to smile and brush it off, but Emilia would not let him go.

Emilia was warm against him as he attempted to at least ease his own stress, and awkwardly moved to hide Emilia from the banquet hall.

It was obvious that they were hugging looking at them sideways. If Subaru shuffled over a little, then it should just look like he had his hands on the railing, staring up at the night sky and spinning poems.

Subaru: "Ok, so those worries are dealt with, now tell me anything."

Emilia: "...Okay, here's a talk between me and my Knight-sama. It's about why Roswaal invited me to participate in the Royal Selection."

Subaru: "———"

Emilia had never discussed this with Subaru before. And it had to have something to do with the Trial, which had so consistently discouraged her.

Subaru swallowed his breath and looked down at Emilia. Their gazes crashed into one another. Seeing himself reflected in Emilia's eyes, Subaru nodded with determination.

Emilia: "Before Elior Forest was frozen, I used to live there with my Mother and... the other elves."

It was a tale of happy memories, a tale of sorrowful memories.

While it arrived in hiccups and pauses, Emilia sincerely told Subaru the story.

Emilia did not know her parents, and Fortuna had loved Emilia in their place. The village had kindly accepted them when they had nowhere to go. And then there had been the organization called the Witch Cult, secretly helping the village, and this character named Juice.

It had been a limited world, but one that showered Emilia in love and kindness. And all was ruined on the day that Elior Forest froze.

The Witch Cult acted brutally as the Witch named Pandora and the Archbishop appeared. The arrival of the Witchbeast Black Serpent, and Fortuna and Juice's tragedy. Emilia kept her mother's promise, and so lost both her and the village. Then came Puck, who she met upon awakening after a long time in the ice.

Emilia: "Puck said he had always been waiting for me, that he had always been looking for me. Then he stayed with me, protecting me, just like he said he would. Even now, he's inside this magic crystal, waiting to be woken up... I can tell."

Subaru: "But you can't speak with him, can you?"

Emilia: "He's still asleep. But it's not because he's rejecting making a Contract with me. I do not think this spellstone will work as his Anchor if he's awake. It needs to be a higher grade, colorless one. If only I could find just a container, and then something to trigger it, I know he will come back."

A blue spellstone was suspended as a pendant around Emilia's neck.

It was a piece of the massive spellstone that had sealed Ryuzu Meyer. It proved insufficient for holding Puck, and the sleeping Spirit could not communicate with the outside.

As if his help during the Garfiel fight had been really, truly his final contribution.

Subaru: "I understand what's going on with Puck. But, about the Royal Selection?"

Emilia: "Me and Puck spent all that time in the frozen forest. Sometimes, I went to the nearby towns too, but they weren't really very welcoming."

Subaru couldn't even imagine how alienated she had been by how that "weren't really very" was. And it was doubtful that Emilia had ever anticipated that she would speak of it.

Emilia: "Then Roswaal came... I think not even a year has passed since then. But it was so sudden that it left me and Puck reeeally shocked."

Subaru: "Well I'd be shocked too, if a guy in clown make-up popped up outta nowhere."

Emilia: "That's true, but what shocked us was that he was in this inaccessible forest. I was on my way back from the village, and he was just standing there waiting for me. And he was playing dumb like always, like, «weeeeeeeeeeeelcome back»..."

Subaru: "Well..."

That would be certainly surprising. It was too late to be commenting on Roswaal's mean-spiritedness, but Subaru could imagine the shock he had given Emilia and Puck at the time.

Emilia: "Puck got so mad... He went from morning to night, just fighting with Roswaal. Thinking back on it, it's a good thing he didn't freeze Roswaal solid."

Subaru: "I mean your smile's adorable, but that's not really something to smile about."

Emilia: "I guess. Anyway, Puck and Roswaal told each other what they wanted while they were fighting, and they managed to start a discussion..."

Subaru: "And Roswaal lured you in by proposing to melt the forest...?"

Emilia's eyes widened. Subaru smiled wryly at her reaction.

Subaru: "It's obvious from how the story was going. And I happened to hear something along those lines before. But, ya know..."

But there had been a shift in Emilia's awareness since then. Before, she had said that she was incapable of freezing Elixir Forest. That she was unable to thaw the ice, even with Puck's help. However,

Subaru: "If you froze the forest, can't you unfreeze it?"

Emilia: "...Mhm, I had that thought too. But I doubt I can."

Subaru: "How come?"

Emilia: "I just can't reach the same power that I had in my memories."

It was an anxious, but confident statement. Subaru furrowed his brows.

"The power I had in my memories". If what Emilia had said was accurate, then that meant power beyond human knowledge. Not even this Witch who called herself Pandora could find a chance to fight Emilia's assault back.

So how come Emilia did not possess that power, considering she had regained her memories?

Subaru: "But you fought the Great Rabbit without backing down an inch."

Emilia: "I don't need Puck or the Micro Spirits' help to cast magic anymore, but that's all. I still can't draw that power out."

Subaru: "-----"

Lamenting her powerlessness, Emilia clenched her fist and weakly shook her head. Her expression, ashamed of her inadequacy, instead shamed Subaru for feeling dejected.

Emilia, of all people, was frustrated about herself. Subaru knew this, so he should not be capable of casting any criticism on her.

And it wasn't even a question that he wanted Emilia to be strong, really.

Subaru: “Ok, no more self-blame. Back to the topic. We’ll agree that you cannot melt the ice... so how’s Roswaal thinking to do it?”

Emilia: “...”

Subaru: “If you can’t do it and Puck can’t do it, then Roswaal shouldn’t be able to either. He may be an amazing magician, but he can’t be ten or twenty times stronger than you. So, how?”

Emilia: “It’s not that Roswaal himself is going to melt the ice. But Roswaal knows something that might melt the ice... All he did was tell me about it.”

Subaru: “Something, that might melt it?”

Something that could thaw the forest that not even the Witch of Glaciation could melt, not even with a Spirit’s help, and not even with ultimate magical power— What could it be?

Emilia: “Dragon’s Blood.”

Subaru: “———”

Emilia: “The Blood of the Dragon, that grants bountiful harvests upon the land, and cures corrupt ground. He said it could definitely thaw the forest.”

Subaru: “Emilia, but that means...”

Killing the Dragon. Wasn’t that right?

She meant to sacrifice the Dragon, which had always protected the Kingdom of Lugunica, for the sake of her forest?

For an instant, the incredible question rushed through Subaru’s mind. But,

Emilia: “No, Subaru. I only need one drop. And the Dragon’s Blood has been used to revitalize the soil during a famine in Lugunica before. I read that in a history book, so it’s definitely true.”

Subaru: “What, so... No, that seriously freaked me out for a second. I mean if we did something like kill the Dragon...”

Would that not free the Witch, sealed by the Dragon's power?

Subaru: "-----"

Anxiety clenched in Subaru's chest, and he forgot to breathe.

The Witches he had met at Echidna's tea party. And the Witch of Envy, who saw him off at the end. Subaru had not forgotten her. He would never forget his resolve from their last instant of goodbye.

But she must not be let free.

She must not be loosed on the world. His instincts assuredly told him so.

Emilia: "The royalty of Lugunica get a chance to talk to the Dragon when they form the Covenant. And some drops of the Blood of the Divine Dragon Volcanica have been kept in the palace, from back then. Once I become Ruler, I want to use that power."

Subaru: "So that's why you're participating..."

Emilia: "...I told you before. The reason I'm participating is reeeally selfish. And that's my selfish reason."

He could hear a smile in her words, but an uneasy one. And her eyes did waver with anxiety as she looked up at him.

She looked scared of what he would say, and what he would think of her resolve. It seemed he was allowed to believe that he was such an important figure to her, that he could make her feel this uneasy.

Subaru: "Don't worry, Emilia-tan. I'm not gonna get disillusioned over something like that."

Emilia: "...Subaru."

Subaru: "You say it's self-centered, but you're not looking for your own gain. You know how to save people you want to save, and instead of dirtying your hands with something like theft, you have decided to use legitimate methods. There is nothing to criticize about that."

Subaru gave her a reassuring smile. But her expression remained anxious.

Subaru knew. This was not what she wanted to hear. If he was going to give her something closer to what she was really looking for, then---

Subaru: "Are you afraid because you think your motivation is inferior to the other candidates'?"

Emilia: "—Hk."

Subaru: "That's a case of grass's greener on the other side. Crusch-san is an amazing person with an amazing goal, yeah, but think about Anastasia-san and Priscilla. Their reasons are nothing worthy of praise."

Greed and ego. That was what motivated them to participate.

And Subaru had not been there to hear it, but what venerable reason could Felt give to be participating in the Selection?

Emilia's desire to save people was not in any way inferior.

Subaru: "And no matter what you wanted at the start, it's different now, isn't it?"

Emilia: "...How can you tell?"

Subaru: "Because you were looking so peacefully at the banquet hall. It's plain for anyone to see."

Unfolding in the Milord banquet hall was a sight where humans and demi-humans, nobles and servants and commoners, all interacted without any division between race or class.

Subaru had called it ideal, and Emilia had gazed at it with longing. Subaru knew exactly how the fire in Emilia's heart was to be kindled.

Subaru: "If your goal is to see that again, I'm helping you. I agree that it's wonderful. No one's gonna stop you from adding that onto your list of reasons for trying."

Emilia: "You'll... really, help me?"

Subaru: “What do you think I just swore to you? Stop worrying, I want you to rely on me first before anyone else. Whenever you want help, I’ll help you, and when you’re unsure, we’ll solve the problem together.”

Emilia: “——”

Emilia swallowed her breath, her eyes wavering.

—What should she say? Her trembling lips could not clearly state what she felt.

Emilia: “—Mm.”

So she muttered only that. And smiled.

—Subaru thought that was all he needed.

Subaru: “Alright, my doubts are all vanished.”

With that, Subaru took in what was left in the glass on the railing. Then he grabbed his thoroughly cooled meat pie, tossed it in his mouth, and chewed. The flavor did not fade even when cold, and the pie just melted in his mouth. Indeed, it was a masterpiece that lived up to Garfiel’s boasting.

Emilia: “Subaru, you’ll choke if you eat so quickly.”

Subaru: “I’ll savor every bite if you feed it to me.”

Emilia: “I feel like I’ve done that somewhere before, when you were exhausted...”

Subaru grinned somewhat sarcastically in response, and led Emilia by the hand to the hall. She looked up at the sky once, before accepting Subaru’s escort and entering the hall side-by-side with him. The party was still underway, and heated up with the honorable guests’ return.

After bringing back a drunk Otto, Garfiel was in agony at the hands of Frederica and Ram’s joint sneak attack, denying him his attempts to drink alcohol. Petra and Beatrice’s uncoordinated dance reached its climax. Sweat dripped from Petra’s brow, and Beatrice was determined to put in an equal effort.

Annerose looked displeased at the fact that Subaru had returned with Emilia, and Clind poked his master's puffed cheeks, aggravating her. Ryuzu and Roswaal stood next to one another, toasted to their repaired relationship, and took a sip from their glasses.

Subaru: "It's wonderful, Emilia-tan."

Emilia: "Yes. This is exactly my ideal scene. I will never forget it."

—So let's have a night to always remember.

They intruded on the two girls, dancing in the most conspicuous spot in the room. They did not know a single step, but they enjoyed themselves all the same.

Through a sea of smiles and confusion, the Knight and Witch, the new master and servant, begun their nonsense dance.

One Day II Special Part 1 - Intersecting Hopes

Has been cut from the Light Novel Adaptation

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by DiscountAnon/Nanashi-tan — [Complete](#) (4.5-8.pdf)

Crusch: “Your Highness, your humble servant will now be departing. Please take care.”

A woman respectfully bowed her head, her green hair swaying slightly, and exited through the door being held open by a few attendants. Accompanying the sound of the closing door came her sigh.

Crusch: “My apologies for troubling you, but please take care to make sure that his Highness is not uncomfortable.”

After hearing the replies of the attendants, the woman, who seemed to be suppressing her emotions, turned and strode down a red-carpeted stairway into a grand hall.

Ferris: “—Crusch-sama.”

Waiting in the hall, calling to her in an urgent tone, was an effeminate young man with round yellow eyes, cat ears, and a sly demeanor. His name was Felix Argyle, or, to most people, Ferris. He was the woman’s long-time trusted companion, as well as one of her knights.

Ferris: “Welcome back. How is Prince Fourier’s situation?”

Crusch: “Not very optimistic. His previous liveliness is entirely gone. Today, he suddenly mentioned wanting to go outside and walk in the sun. It was... painful to watch.”

Crusch Karsten shook her head, and Ferris responded with a dejected slump of his shoulders. Seeing the reaction of her flax-haired companion, Crusch spoke up again.

Crusch: “There is no need for you to feel guilt. This illness is a puzzle that the best healers of the country still cannot solve. It is not your fault.”

Ferris: “But, it’s because of Ferri’s own weakness that I cannot meet Crusch-sama’s expectations... I am deeply sorry, Crusch-sama.”

Ferris seemed less remorseful about his inability to cure the illness and more remorseful about Crusch’s grief for Fourier. As usual, he snuggled close to her, and Crusch allowed him to do so.

Crusch: “Does the course of his Highness’s... does course of the Royal Family’s disease remain unchanged?”

Ferris: “Yes, it’s the same as the previous diagnosis, although, as a healer, I don’t want to say this lightly.”

Ferris lowered both his voice and head, but continued to speak without hesitation.

Ferris: “—It is the poison of the Black Serpent. The cause of such a mysterious illness could only be from the creature we don’t know anything about.”

Crusch: “If so, then where is it now...? No, the situation at hand is more pressing. What will happen from here on?”

Ferris: “The worst case scenario is... the death of the entire Royal Family.”

Crusch: “———”

Although she had already reached this conclusion, no matter how many times she heard it, it would still be difficult to accept.

Crusch took a deep, calming breath. This was an unprecedented situation. If she lost her cool and let her feelings run loose, the crisis would never be solved. In such chaos, the only reason the Kingdom had been clinging to stability was because Crusch and the Council of Wise Men had been working with the high aristocracy to lead the kingdom forward.

The blood of the Royal Family of Lugunica was, at this very moment, facing termination.

The first victim of the disease had been First Prince Zabinel Lugunica. Originally, his illness had been diagnosed as fatigue caused overwork, but Zabinel's condition worsened severely in just a few days. Soon afterward, more members of the Royal Family fell ill in a similar fashion, and thus the anomaly of the disease was discovered.

Only those who carried the royal blood of Lugunica were affected. Upon realizing this, the castle collapsed into fierce commotion, only brought to a stop by various members of the Council of Wise Men, whose members resided in the Royal Castle. Crusch, and especially Ferris, the latter known within Lugunica as the one who sat at the peak of healing water magic and held the title of Blue, were also instrumental in this stability.

The various members of the Royal Family were taken to one location, where they were diagnosed and prepared for instant treatment. There, they found that no one, not even Ferris, could cure the disease.

In only a few days, the long-standing lineage of the Royal Family of Lugunica had been brought to the verge of extinction.

Currently, a number of leading healers were gathered, attempting to extend the lives of the Royal Family with magic, but it was merely a temporary solution. The situation of the Royal Family had been hidden from the public, but this pretense of normalcy could only last for so long.

Pondering the severity of the situation, Crusch thought of the person she had been visiting, the Fourth Prince of Lugunica, Fourier Lugunica.

Fourier and Crusch were close together in age, and Crusch, the daughter of a Duke, had been acquainted with him since childhood. Fourier, as a Prince, had difficulty finding friends of the same age, and so Crusch could be counted as one of his closest friends.

Crusch was the same way, never disliking his presence.

Fourier frequently visited the Karsten household, and liked to bring with him a number of troublesome problems to share with Crusch. His real intent was to garner the attention of the girl he liked, but Crusch had never noticed.

She had always merely regarded him as dear, kind-hearted friend who she had not minded.

Fourier, along with the rest of Lugunica's Royal Family, had no great talent as a politician. Even so, his eagerness and virtue were apparent. He was far from succeeding the throne, and his future position would probably not be one of great responsibility. And yet, he was burning with the enthusiasm to do his best at his given role.

Seeing him lying in bed, on the verge of death, tortured Crusch's heart endlessly.

Ferris: "Crusch-sama..."

Crusch's expression remained unchanged, but her eyes were filled with pain. Seeing this caused Ferris's own heart to seize as well.

Using the length of their relationship with Crusch as a criteria, Fourier had known her longer than Ferris had. Of course, Ferris, as Crusch's follower, held a greater amount of loyalty to her. Ferris was content just watching Fourier and Crusch, while burying his feelings deep in his chest.

Therefore, for Ferris, Fourier was a person who evoked several complicated emotions.

Of course, Ferris's feelings would not in any way impact Fourier's treatment or diagnosis. It would compromise Ferris's pride as a healer, as well as serve as a betrayal to Crusch, who trusted Ferris more than anyone else. However, his inability to live up to that trust and save Fourier weighed heavily on Ferris's heart.

Striding through the castle, both the master and the knight walked with heavy footsteps. Crusch thought of the past and of Fourier, while Ferris thought of his incapability and his master.

In any case, today, in the castle, neither of them could do anything. Thus, together, they prepared to leave the castle and return their residence.

???: "—Lord Bordeaux! That is different from what you'd said before!"

Crusch and Ferris, on their way to the castle gate, looked up in the direction of that sound. A little ways from the main gate was a garden, lined with a trimmed lawn and trees planted left and right. The nearby argument disrupted the peace of the quiet scenery.

Crusch couldn't help but look back at the argument occurring in the corner of the garden, between two people, one facing her and one turned away. She immediately recognized the one whose face was visible. He was a tall, bald man with a strong physique named Bordeaux Zergev, a member of Lugunica's Council of Wise Men²⁰⁷. The Council of Wise Men consisted of senior aristocrats who were responsible for the majority of the affairs of the state in Lugunica.

A post in the Council of Wise Men was gained through election, and each candidate's knowledge, heritage, contribution to the kingdom, and overall ability, would be evaluated carefully. Represented by Miklotov, they were now acting as the skeleton of the kingdom.

Bordeaux had once been a battlefield hero, and even on the Council of Wise Men was an outspoken, heavily opinionated man. He was known for his radical remarks and his attitude was enough to be ridiculed by Ferris as "always in a rage". Crusch, upon immediately succeeding her position, had been countless subjected to his remarks.

Perhaps it was because he always wore such a bullish attitude that his gloomy, withdrawn demeanor immediately caught Crusch's attention.

Ferris: "What an unusual expression for Bordeaux-sama."

Having noticed what Crusch also had, Ferris offered his own commentary. Crusch gave a nod and attempted to figure the situation out. If it were just a verbal struggle, there was no need for her to interfere, but even for a modest quarrel, the timing and place were poor.

The soldier standing by the gate, also having heard the shouting, had come to investigate as well, and upon seeing Crusch bowed his head to her, as if accepting her judgement of the situation. Crusch passed her gaze over the guard as well as Bordeaux, who had noticed that people had gathered around him.

Bordeaux, seemingly possessing the intent of leaving the field, nodded bitterly at them. Searching for the right words, he moistened his lips slightly. While watching the gesture, Crusch finally examined the person standing in front of Bordeaux.

²⁰⁷ The Kanji here is “賢人会”, and could be translated as “Council of Sages”. However, I opted to make a distinction from the term Sage/Sage Candidate which uses similar Kanji (賢人/賢人候補, respectively), just in case these are unrelated (which they very well might be).

Crusch finally realized why the other man had failed to enter her perception.

Crusch: “———”

He was a figure dressed in rags.

The true identity of these rags wrinkled and slightly dirty dark blue coat, hanging from the shoulder of a tall body and reaching to the bottom of his waist. His white hair, and the earlier sound of his voice, indicated elderliness. However, from his abundant hair, to the muscles in his back, and the broadness of his shoulders, there was no trace of the weakness associated with old age.

Despite being so prominent, the man had escaped Crusch’s attention until just now. The reason was his perfect stance. His movements were naturally elegant, and he wasted no motion. As soon as she noticed, Crusch was mesmerized.

As a warrior wielding a sword, Crusch had an ideal to strive for. The man in rags in front of her eyes embodied her ideal, serving as proof that with continuous effort and training, that ideal, that of the “apex of the art of war”, could be reached.

Ferris: “Crusch-sama?”

Crusch, who had been unconsciously drawn into a trance, was brought back by Ferris’s call, but she could not recover her previous unaffected state.

Who was that old man?

Bordeaux: “I am deeply sorry to breach our agreement, but our current situation is too dire. I hope you will understand.”

The conversation between Bordeaux and the man resumed, with Crusch standing at a loss. Bordeaux spoke with an air of finality, as if hoping to leave the conversation.

Bordeaux: “If people gather here, the situation will be made public, and trouble will occur.”

Old Man: “Wait... How can I be satisfied with those words? Why... Why did you suddenly change your mind? We’d clearly reached an agreement, and...”

Bordeaux: “It’s not your fault, it’s just a matter of the timing. We will need to delay it for a while. Again, I am sorry.”

Old Man: “But...!”

To the desperate man, Bordeaux’s words came off as hesitant and empty. The reason for Bordeaux’s secrecy was caused by a need to keep the condition of the Royal Family secret. That had taken precedent over Bordeaux’s agreement with the man, and their promise had been, at least temporarily, voided.

However, although the truth could not be spoken, it was clumsy of Bordeaux to not formulate a convincing cover-up story.

Or perhaps something in their agreement left Bordeaux unable or unwilling to lie to the man?

Was hiding facts or telling lies more dishonest? In any case, Bordeaux was unwilling to lie to the man. Bordeaux stood tall and presented his words, but the man in rags could not accept them.

Old Man: “I’ve heard the rumors of the worsening relationship with the Empire. If you are hesitant to leave the country because of that, please at least send a messenger...”

Bordeaux: “It’s not that, I would ask you to refrain from asking too much. Once things have settled down, let’s choose a different place to set up a discussion. I don’t know when that will be, but...”

Old Man: “Then it will be too late! Like I said, next month, I will have results coming in, so we will have conclusive evidence... please at least look at this and consider it.”

In response to Bordeaux’s determined attitude, the words of the man in rags became more desperate. He drew something out of his pocket, a large bundle of papers. The edges were wrinkled, and the papers themselves yellowed and speckled with dirt and blood. How important were those papers to him? Seeing how his fingers shivered while grasping it, anyone could tell at a glance. But—

Bordeaux: “—Enough!”

Bordeaux waved his hand at the papers that were held to his chest. Was it because the man had not been expecting it, or had Bordeaux added unintentional force to it? Perhaps it was the overlap of both. Whatever the reason, that action had led to a result.

Old Man: “———”

The bundle of papers left the old man’s hands and scattered across the garden. The wind, although weak, easily swept the pieces of paper through the air like white petals and scattered them over the garden.

Crusch unconsciously reached out toward them, and Bordeaux’s eyes flashed with a trace of regret. However, neither could react to the man’s immediate response.

Old Man: “Bordeaux!”

With a shout, the man in rags seized Bordeaux’s lapel and shoved him against a wall. The latter released a pained breath from the impact. Although he had been pressed against the wall, raising his large body with one arm was no small feat of strength.

Witnessing the scene, Crusch should have immediately called for assistance.

However, the aura given out by the man in rags overwhelmed her and delayed her reaction. The atmosphere seemed to turn dry, and Crusch felt her skin tingle.

As was, the man in rags drove his sharp gaze into Bordeaux.

Ferris: “Guards! Don’t just stand there, come over here! Quickly!”

A voice rose and cried out for guard, stirring Crusch back into action. Looking back, she saw that Ferris, who had watched the situation deteriorate, had raised his hands to wave the guards at the gate over, who had been frozen in shock.

Granted, they had never seen a Wise Man in danger before. Three of the guards rushed to the scene with swords drawn and surrounded Bordeaux and the man.

The atmosphere seemed to spread, and the situation grew tense, but,

Old Man: “—Apologies.”

With a word of apology, the man abruptly released Bordeaux. Bordeaux collapsed against the wall, stifling his coughing with a hand on his throat.

Although the gate soldiers were watching vigilantly, the old man widened his hands to show no resistance and stepped back slowly.

Guard: "Empty your hands and listen to our instructions!"

The guards, still recovering from their earlier embarrassment, resumed their duties and surrounded the old man. According to the law, the old man would be detained and placed under investigation.

Bordeaux: "Wait... There is no need to conduct this so formally, you can release him."

Guard: "Bordeaux-dono, I am not qualified to say this, but that will damage the reputation of the guards. Can the guards who protect the royals release such a suspicious person?"

Bordeaux: "In that case, restrain him for one night and then release him."

In response to the old man's words, Bordeaux delivered a new instruction in a regretful tone. The guards listened obediently. The old man, being escorted by the guards, turned to Crusch.

Old Man: "I am most grateful."

At the volume he had spoken, he had been only intending for Crusch to hear those words. The old man's clear blue eyes housed a shadow. Although curious, Crusch decided it would be too rude to force the guards to linger for their dialogue.

As the old man left, Crusch turned to Ferris.

Crusch: "Your quick response just now was a great help. I apologize for not reacting in time."

Ferris: "No, no, it was nothing at all. I'm just glad the situation didn't escalate. By the way... Bordeaux-sama?"

Ferris, who humbly put his finger on his lip as he turned the topic back to Bordeaux.

Bordeaux, who had recovered from his previous shock, was crouched on the ground, picking up the scattered paper. Crusch also picked up several fallen pieces near her feet and handed them to Bordeaux.

Bordeaux: "...Thank you, Karsten-kyo²⁰⁸. I apologize for that unsightly scene."

Crusch: "Not at all. Seeing a serious Bordeaux is so rare that I should have paid a viewing fee. That said, could you answer something?"

Bordeaux: "-----"

Bordeaux, rearranging the collected papers, responded with silence. Judging that to be an affirmative reply, Crusch looked towards the direction in which the old man had left.

Crusch: "That man just now, was he an acquaintance of Bordeaux-dono?"

Bordeaux: "—He's an old friend. No, more like a battlefield comrade. A former battlefield comrade, that's what he would accept."

Crusch: "It is not my place to pry, but if you cherish this relationship, you should aim to repair it as soon as possible. Although, you should choose a better occasion next time."

What had caused trouble here had been the time and place. It was the old man who had attacked Bordeaux, but it was Bordeaux's poor choices that had caused it. Seeing the Wind of Regret blowing by Bordeaux however, Crusch did not hold him in disregard.

Bordeaux: "...I do not know if I can face him again, although I do not consider choosing my loyalty to the throne of Lugunica over my gratitude and debt toward him a mistake."

Crusch: "I see."

Crusch was well-aware that Bordeaux would not listen to her advice, so there was little disappointment. Rather, his clumsy stubbornness was even a little admirable. If she said so however, she would certainly anger him like usual.

Bordeaux: "Did you visit his Highness?"

Crusch: "I am returning from visiting his Highness Prince Fourier. Ferris's diagnosis is not optimistic."

²⁰⁸ Note by DiscountAnon: "The «-kyo» honorific apparently equates the English «sir»".

Bordeaux: “That is as expected... While you are here, I should warn you that Leip Barielle is plotting something, although it probably will not amount to anything major. Still, be on guard.”

Crusch: “Baron Barielle... I will keep that in mind.”

She nodded at Bordeaux’s advice. It was distraction from the main topic, but even if she kept pursuing, she knew Bordeaux would not reply. As the conversation ended, Bordeaux held the bundle of collected paper to his chest and left the garden.

Together, Crusch and Ferris breathed a sigh of relief.

Ferris: “Ahhhhhh~, that was a really tense atmosphere. We saw a really rarely seen side of the always tough Bordeaux-sama, though. He would be so much cuter if he were always like this.”

Crusch: “That would be inconvenient, since Miklotov-dono, always calm, and Bordeaux-dono, always in motion, are quite adept at handling the Council of Wise Men together, but...”

The commotion just now, what had been it about? Of course, Crusch wanted to know the details of it, but what had caught her attention more was the old man who had been taken away.

If she could, she would like to learn his true identity.

Ferris: “Anywaysyyy~! Crusch-sama, Ferri would rather not say it himself, but I think that I’m the one that knows Crusch-sama better than anyone else.”

Crusch: “Hmm? That was abrupt... There’s no need to mention such an obvious statement. You are irreplaceably important to me, so why suddenly bring that up now?”

Ferris: “Hearing that evaluation, I think I can go one step further today.”

Ferris stuck out a red tongue with a mischievous expression. Crusch could not tell what he was thinking or planning. The Wind blowing by Ferris was smoky, as if covering up his true feelings, and Crusch had always been unable to discern them.

Crusch Karsten’s Divine Protection of Wind Reading allowed her to see the flow of the Wind. That Wind caught the ripples of feelings of others, and, in general, Crusch had no issue interpreting it. However, in rare cases, she encountered those like Ferris, who were skilled at hiding their emotions.

In Ferris's case, due to their long association, Crusch could read the Wind to a certain degree. There were others, like the Wise Man Miklotov, who could hide their feelings easily due to their many years of experience. Crusch labelled her negotiation technique as a type that was useless against experts at maintaining their composure.

As usual, Ferris did not let Crusch read his emotions, so once he put on that air, Crusch had no choice but to hold her hands together and wait for his answer, per their norm. But she was certain that she could put her full trust in Ferris. And, this time, the trust that their bond had created had again demonstrated its strength.

Ferris: "I'm thinking that Crusch-sama is surely wondering about the old man from just now."

Crusch: "Hmm."

Ferris: "I've already prepared this for you."

Watching Ferris, who was smiling, and seeing what he was holding in his fingertips, Crusch widened her eyes, then suddenly loosened her lips into a smile.

Crusch: "You are truly the one who knows my heart best."

Between the faintly smiling Ferris's fingers rested a single piece of paper, one that he had neglected to hand Bordeaux, one that was waiting to be received while being shaken by the wind.

One Day II Special Part 2 - The Day Before the Selection

Light Novel Adaptation partially found in EX Volume 1, Chapter “The Dream of the Lion King”, Part 6

Original Web Novel Chapter — [Complete](#)

Original Translation by DiscountAnon — [Complete](#) (4.5-9.pdf)

Crusch: “My deepest apologies, but I have read your secret report.”

Crusch, gazing across the iron bars of the cell, felt as if she were looking somewhere incredibly far away. The old man sat in the center, legs crossed and posture erect.

The rags which he had worn in the garden were neatly folded and placed on the ground. From his posture, Crusch could see that her initial assessment was correct; he was a highly trained warrior. However, his hollow cheeks and faded hair also gave a sense of unhealthiness.

Old Man: “———”

Crusch: “It’s a document assessing the pros and cons of... Oh, excuse me. My apologies for beginning so abruptly without first introducing myself.”

Meeting his silent gaze, Crusch placed one hand on her chest and straightened her posture. The dusty air in the prison seemed to stir with her movements. This change in atmosphere was rather eye-catching nature, and the eyes of old man’s gaze changed slightly in nature.

Crusch: “I am the head of the Karsten family, Duchess Crusch Karsten. Earlier, I had come across you²⁰⁹ and Bordeaux in the palace garden, and I was curious about your argument.”

Old Man: “Duchess... Karsten?”

²⁰⁹ Translation note by DiscountAnon: “Crusch uses a really formal you, it’s more or less the equivalent of «sir».”

Upon hearing Crusch's introduction, the old man's expression changed again, this time to one of simultaneous comprehension and confusion.

Old Man: "Should the head of the Karsten family not be Meckart-sama?"

Crusch: "Meckart Karsten is my father. Two years ago, father passed the position to me, and now I hold the position of Duchess. However, you seem privy to some of our internal affairs... But what you know is probably from several years ago. I am afraid that the reason for the earlier dispute may stem from here."

Old Man: "Were the officials too lacking and so I must be properly investigated by the Duke?"

Crusch: "In truth, I have no intention of prying into the dispute between you and Bordeaux-sama. That is just the pretext I used to convince the guards to let me down here."

In the face of the old man's ironic expression, Crusch could only smile bitterly.

Currently, they were at dungeon near the Royal Knights' barracks, which was located in the immediate vicinity of the castle. Crusch's investigation had led her here, and she had devised a suitable excuse for the guards to let her in. Right now, Ferris was probably still chatting with the guards, stalling for time.

Old Man: "You used the term excuse, so is there another reason you are here? Is this about my disrespect to Bordeaux-sama?"

Crusch: "...Of course not, Bordeaux-sama would never allow me do so. He is a firm believer in taking responsibility for his own actions, and, as such, you will be released tomorrow morning. However, if what happened today happens again, it may not be so easy to cover up."

Old Man: "Those reckless actions will not happen again. The dispute in the garden happened due to my own immaturity, but this cold dungeon has cooled my head down."

The words were intoned with a smile, but the old man's expression did not change. Even so, that self-aware admission was completely sincere. The man felt no anger toward Bordeaux, only self-deprecation. However, in that self-deprecation, Crusch saw an unusually dense, almost overwhelming emotion being carried by the Wind.

—Anger. That feeling was undoubtedly anger.

The rage that had taken root at the old man's heart was strong enough to melt even steel. With a sober, razor sharp gaze, the old man looked at Crusch. And, the cause of that all-consuming rage,

Crusch: "—The White Whale."

Old Man: "——"

Crusch: "The expression in your eyes has changed."

The moment he heard Crusch's whisper, dark anger flashed through the old man's eyes. It disappeared quickly, without leaving a trace, but it did not escape the gaze of the expectant Crusch. She presented the paper she had taken into the prison, the same paper that had been scattered and left uncollected in the garden, and stepped over the metal fence to continue the conversation with the old man.

Crusch: "Like I said at first, my apologies. I have already read through this part of your report. The rest I handed the Bordeaux-sama. This is only a missing piece of it."

Old Man: "...Bordeaux-sama is disagreeable as always. I pointed out a long time ago that he should watch his attitude, it does not seem like he has listened at all."

Crusch: "That is merely a part of his nature. It's difficult to imagine a perfect Bordeaux-sama, after all."

Old Man: "It's just as you say."

For the first time, Crusch and the old man, having stumbled upon a common topic, shared a laugh. Although this was at a bald old man's expense, Crusch was glad to have shared this moment. She breathed a slight sigh and focused on the document once more.

Crusch: "Although I only have one portion of the report, it is a very relevant portion indeed. Its contents are really quite interesting to me, and, if they are all in fact true, then this is a fairly extraordinary discovery."

Old Man: "——"

Crusch: "Appearances of the White Whale in recent years has been summarized in here. This report also contains information from Gusteko, Vollachia, Kararagi, and several small countries. The date and time

of appearance and disappearance is recorded in every summary. I only have this one document, but I am sure the full report takes it to an even greater extent.”

Old Man: “———”

The old man voiced no reply.

Mirrored in the old man’s eyes, Crusch grew ever more fervent in her narration. Of course, reading this report would cause most people to react with burning passion.

The White Whale. A Witchbeast which had hounded the world since the days of the Witch. A malicious presence that had ruined countless lives and yet still roamed free. In the past, many soldiers had been assembled to subjugate the White Whale, but the crusade had ended in failure, a black spot in the dignified history of the Kingdom of Lugunica.

The damage suffered then could never fully be recovered from, and most did not know of the full extent of the crusade’s loss. That was the most despicable property of the White Whale; that those who suffered trying to stop it would be forgotten.

Crusch was far from the only angry one. Everyone who knew about the White Whale hated it with a passion.

Crusch: “But you put your anger to use, and the results were fruitful. If we can use your information to defeat the White Whale, it will come to save a great many people.”

Everyone walking in the streets, from businessmen and pedestrians, were constantly exposed to its threat, but due to the White Whale’s unpredictable appearances, it was impossible to protect everyone.

Crusch: “The victims of the White Whale will be greatly reduced, thanks to your valuable actions.”

Old Man: “———”

Crusch: “—«So what of it?», is what your expression says.”

Old Man: “———”

The old man's expression had changed for the first time since Crusch had delved into the contents of the document. Color returned to his cold eyes, and his gaze on Crusch intensified, as if saying "what do you wish to say?". To the silent old man, Crusch responded.

Crusch: "I understand your goal, Sir. To spend so much time and effort to track down this beast, to have the spirit to keep pursuing it, and to then give up on it? You could never do such a thing."

Old Man: "...So, what should I do?"

Crusch: "Your aim is doubtlessly to punish the White Whale. To find a pattern to its appearances is for no other purpose than to track it down and end it with a sufficiently prepared force. You are a swordsman, and what swordsman would throw away the sword and choose the path of escape? Ridiculous."

With the pieces she had, Crusch could puzzle together the arrangement between the old man and Bordeaux. Together, they had been planning to scope out and attack the Witchbeast, but, due to the Royal Family's illness, Bordeaux, busy with his duties on the Council of Wise Men, could no longer assist with the plan. And so, the danger of the White Whale was left unaddressed.

Crusch: "You mentioned sending messengers to Vollachia. Then, the next appearance of the White Whale will presumably be there?"

Old Man: "If the appearance in Vollachia is confirmed, then it will come to the Kingdom of Lugunica in six months' time. Yes, if that confirmation is obtained, then soldiers could be sent out, and...!"

Crusch: "This is surely why Bordeaux-sama is troubled."

Old Man: "Why... Why!? Why, now, are you going back on your word? Have you not talked at length about your grudge against the White Whale...? You too, you too were angry at having something precious being stolen from you! Have you forgotten Thearesia, Bordeaux?!"

The wrathful shout tore through the air of the prison and pierced into Crusch's ears. The old man slammed a fist on the ground and biting his lip. It was anger directed toward Bordeaux, who had broken his promise, and directed toward the White Whale, which had taken something precious from him, but, above all else, it was anger directed at himself, for being too weak to do anything.

Old Man: “I am already running out of time... If this appearance is missed, several years will pass until the White Whale returns to Lugunica. By then, my body will weaken, even more than it has already... This body still continues to die, so if the attack is postponed, my hope at vengeance disappears...”

Crusch: “———”

Weeping.

The old man’s voice was soft and contained little trace of tearfulness. However, his spirit seemed on the verge of vanishing. This weeping, shaking the old man to his core, was more than enough to carve scars on the hearts of those who heard it.

Thearesia. The name spoken by the old man was a familiar one.

And rightfully so. No swordsman in the Kingdom of Lugunica could not have heard of the name of the Sword Saint. Thearesia was the hero who had ended the civil war plaguing the entire Kingdom. She was beautiful, strong, and the sword loved her more than it loved anything else.

And, in the end, she had been killed by the very White Whale she had been sent to subjugate.

Crusch: “Ah.”

Immediately after the mention of Thearesia’s name invoked, another existence was invoked in the recesses of Crusch’s mind.

A person with close ties to Thearesia, a person who had reached the pinnacle of swordsmanship, a person who made Crusch tremble. There was only one such man in her memory. The legendary man was one who had followed the way of the sword, one who had also been one who could end a war with a sword. He had also loved the woman who was loved by the sword.

He had been a demon who had taken Thearesia from the sword god.

Crusch: “The Sword Demon, Wilhelm van Astrea.”

This man was legend upon legend, with a story so fascinating that it was remembered by song. Crusch herself, had too loved that song in childhood.

Then, in front of her was the ghost she had long admired.

Wilhelm: “I abandoned that particular name. I cast off my title and house, van Astrea.”

Crusch: “I see. What name do you go by now?”

Wilhelm: “Trias. The name of a fallen noble house, once located in the outskirts of Lugunica, which was destroyed decades ago. The last head of house loved his people dearly, even though he lacked the power to defend his territory. The current me is merely wandering between worlds, unable to even restore righteousness to the house of my birth. I have only my family name left.”

Crusch: “Wilhelm Trias.”

Wilhelm: “Yes. This is the now shameful name of former Sword Demon.”

Placing a fist on the cold floor, the old man, Wilhelm, made a respectful gesture toward Crusch.

That attitude toward a member of the nobility would typically be marked as disrespectful, but Crusch did not notice this at all. In fact, this display could better be said to have fascinated Crusch so much she could hardly remember to breathe.

Crusch: “Dedicating so much to track the whale... are you aiming to avenge his wife?”

Wilhelm: “I have no other goal... No, I have no other reason to live.”

In his clear eyes, there rested no sign of hesitation.

Crusch had finally arrived at the point where she fully understood Wilhelm’s intentions, and understood the goal he had dedicated a decade to.

—And also understood that, considering the current situation, that goal would not be fulfilled.

Crusch: “—I have understood your wish, but you must understand that that wish cannot be fulfilled as is.”

Wilhelm: "...Why not?"

Crusch: "If you rely on Bordeaux-sama, Bordeaux-sama will not be able to act in time to apprehend the Whale in half a year's time."

As long as the Royal Family was ill, no matter what fate would become of them, the Kingdom would surely enter into an unprecedented state of confusion. The Kingdom and its people would be completely shaken, and everything would be subject to change. The senior aristocrats would try to manage, but, in the end, it was the role of the Council of Wise Men to guide Lugunica back into stability.

Wilhelm: "-----"

Wilhelm remained silent. However, his mind was evidently nowhere near as calm as his expression and attitude would suggest.

Crusch could see crushing, overwhelming anger emanating from Wilhelm. Yes, pure, blind rage.

Right now, the only emotion that remained in the Sword Demon's ghost was wrath.

—Regret.

That was the emotion that Crusch felt toward Wilhelm, and endless regret. Regret, resignation, pity. Such emotions emerged one after another.

Choosing to be bound to a way of life, life choosing a path for one to be bound to. They seemed similar, but, in essence, they were completely different.

Being her real self, acting the way her soul desires to, was how Crusch had decided to absolutely live. Living as if bathed in Wind, that was what Crusch had regarded as the most perfect, the most beautiful way to live.

Therefore, the path of the Sword Demon, who had been bound to his way of life, was too sad, in reality. With unbearable burning anger in his heart, even after a decade, the Sword Demon's blade had stayed honed, and kept its sharpness. If his long-cherished wish could not be reached, then his sharpness could do nothing but tarnish.

Crusch was overcome with the desire to help him, but the same responsibility that had bound Bordeaux bound Crusch as well. Crusch finally believed she understood the meaning of Bordeaux's bitterness in that garden.

Or, rather, to Bordeaux, the name of Thearesia would be more meaningful. The Wilhelm who spoke of Bordeaux without a distant title, and the Bordeaux who had called Wilhelm a friend and comrade. Crusch, in this moment, could not measure up to the relationship between them.

Wilhelm: "I must thank you for your precious time, but it seems as if further dialogue between us will no longer be significant."

Although Crusch's face presented no obvious emotion, sometimes, eyes were more eloquent than words. In Crusch's amber eyes, Wilhelm found an answer. Even without relying on a Divine Protection of Wind Reading, with experience, an ordinary person could discern what they needed to.

Having been seen through, Crusch did not commit a dishonorable behavior such as trying to hide her intent.

Crusch: "After this, what will you do?"

Wilhelm: "My plans have not changed. If I cannot depend on Bordeaux-dono, I will find another influential person to collaborate with. Before this corpse I call my body decays, it must fulfill its purpose of finding revenge."

Crusch: "———"

Wilhelm was in a dilemma.

Only the senior aristocrats had the power to return an answer to Wilhelm's request. But those senior aristocrats were now struggling to quell the confusion resulting from the royal illness. If he found a family of lower aristocrats willing to lend a hand, their house would likely lack the ability to subjugate the White Whale.

If he looked to a sponsor outside of the aristocracy, there would be further complications. A powerful businessman, such as the old fox Russell Fellow, who was based in the Lugunica, would be more concerned with using the White Whale's subjugation for commerce than for crusade.

That said, Wilhelm becoming a target for assassins would be not unlikely. Before Wilhelm had left his family, the prestige of the Astrea family would have protected him. However, now Wilhelm called himself Trias. He could no longer consider himself an Astrea. And so, if any unfortunate situation ever came about,

Crusch: “Do not lose yourself to rage. The only one who can protect you is yourself.”

Wilhelm: “I understand. The inability to achieve my goal because of such frivolity would bring me a greater shame than anything else. Thank you for your heartfelt advice.”

Although he spoke politely, Wilhelm’s thoughts were already far removed from Crusch. Crusch could only think that the old man had already carefully considered each of her ideas on many sleepless nights.

If there was one thing that he had not considered due to his lack of knowledge, it was the calamity plaguing the castle. And that information could absolutely not be leaked.

Crusch: “Sir Trias... No, Trias-dono²¹⁰, I apologize for making you speak of that past that you do not mention lightly. Although I wish there was more I could do, I sincerely hope that your desire will be fulfilled.”

Wilhelm: “Those are wasteful words.”

Closing his eyes, Wilhelm clearly had no intent of speaking again. Crusch had also arrived at this point, where more words would be meaningless. Both sides were speechless. Crusch turned her back to Wilhelm. Her long green hair cut through the air of the prison, and seemed to propel her to its exit.

Ferris: “The conversation went smoothly? By the looks of it, it did go smoothly.”

Climbing the stairs, holding back a sigh, Crusch heard a soft shout. It was Ferris, sitting in the entrance of the guard barracks, rocking back and forth on his chair, causing a creaking sound.

He tossed the cards in his hand on the table and smiled at the two losing guards he was competing with.

²¹⁰ Crusch changes from treating him as “kyo” (卿), the equivalent of Sir, to “dono” (殿), which is more akin to Lord.

Ferris: “Well, since my master is back, that’ll be all for today. I’ll send a knight by later to collect my winnings, so please be prepared.”

Crusch: “What on earth are you betting on this time?”

Ferris: “Ferri would feel really embarrassed saying it, but, but, if Crusch-sama really wants to know, Ferri will bite back his shame and. Crusch-sama?”

Ferris’s fidgeting, blushing expression changed as he approached Crusch. His fingertips brushed Crusch’s cheeks, and the two naturally met their gazes.

Ferris: “Your complexion isn’t so good, is something wrong?”

Crusch: “I still cannot hide anything from you... It is just like the situation with Prince Fourier. My troubles feel overwhelming, which makes me angry at my own powerlessness.”

Ferris: “But, even so, Crusch-sama hasn’t stopped moving forward.”

Ferris gently wrapped a hand around one of Crusch’s, which was painfully tense. The touch caused Crusch’s shoulder to relax a little, and she returned Ferris’s smile.

Crusch: “Really, I can never win against you. You seem to know me better than I do.”

Ferris: “Of course, I already know everything. Inside and outside, there are hardly any places of Crusch-sama that I haven’t touched yet.”

Hearing Ferris’s colorful and rather dramatic words, Crusch was unsure of why the two guards behind them had reacted with confusion. While curious about the reaction, Crusch nodded in agreement.

Crusch: “I will withdraw today, but tomorrow will be different, and tomorrow’s tomorrow will also be different. Right.”

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In the days after encountering Wilhelm, Crusch passed her time as she had expected.

The Royal Family's health continued to decline, and the liberated Wilhelm fruitlessly searched for another collaborator. Crusch was nigh buried in her work in the Kingdom's affairs and had needed to shamefully request her retired father's help in governing the Karsten territories.

Of course, neither those problems were Crusch's fault alone, but as long as she was involved in them, she would be frustrated at her inability to help.

This almost arrogant sense of responsibility was a part of Crusch Karsten's creed. Those cloudy, seemingly endless days eventually came to an abrupt end.

—The King of Lugunica, Randohal Lugunica, passed away.

And following him came the rest of the Royal Family, Fourier Lugunica being no exception. Fourier expired with Crusch holding his hand until the very last.

And only Ferris had seen the tears streaming down Crusch's face.

Leip: "The Dragon History Stone²¹¹ has new writing carved upon it. I'm sure everyone understands what this means."

In the parliament where the senior aristocrats met together, an old man was unable to hide his excitement. He was Baron Leip Barielle. Although he was the Lord of the Barielle territory, he was also a person who had been entrusted with a special task by the Royal Family. And his role was,

???: "A change in the Dragon History Stone... Is there a new prophecy concerning the future of the kingdom?"

Leip: "This is exactly the case. As is my duty anointed by His Majesty, I will convey to the assembled Lords about the change in Dragon History Stone. Please listen carefully."

He knelt and offered a respectful salute to the members of the parliament. Leip's rank was not so high that he should be part of a meeting of senior aristocrats. Still, they all paid Leip the same respect. This was the influence of the Dragon History Stone.

²¹¹ Opted to use the literal translation for "竜歴石". The Light Novel uses the alternative name of "Dragon Tablet".

The Dragon History Stone— it was one of the sacraments given as proof of the Covenant in place between the Royal Family and the Divine Dragon Volcanica. Like the Blood of the Dragon that would bring plentiful harvests to the land, the Dragon History Stone was treated as a sacred artifact, and was kept secure in a room within the Royal Castle, limited to the Royal Family and some like Leip. Only those with qualifications could enter to read it.

The Dragon History Stone appeared to be a square black plate, made of an unknown mineral. Much of its function was also not understood. The only certain thing was that when the Kingdom approached a crisis, the Dragon History Stone would describe the method to overcome it.

In the past, Lugunica had been saved many times from crisis due to the writ of the Dragon History Stone, and its reliability was more or less guaranteed. However,

Bordeaux: “Wait... Although the prophecy comes from the Dragon History Stone, are we certain we can trust it?”

Interrupting Leip’s description of the Stone’s content was a bald old man, Bordeaux. His severe, glaring expression looked down on the smaller Leip from above. Leip frowned and stared back up at Bordeaux.

Leip: “Trust? That should not be a question, Bordeaux-sama. The Dragon History Stone has never been wrong. As a member of the Council of Wise Men, surely you would be aware of this?”

Bordeaux: “I will acknowledge that it has saved the Kingdom many times, but this time is different. If the Dragon History Stone had served its purpose and tried to save the Kingdom, why did it not react to the illness of His Highness and the rest of the Royal Family? Surely the correct path would have been to save them!”

Aristocrats: “———”

Bordeaux’s phrasing was rough, spoken in a loud voice, and the majority of the assembled aristocrats seemed to agree with him.

Crusch, who was also seated in the parliament, nodded her assent. She firmly believed that if the Dragon History Stone had wanted to help Lugunica, the Royal Family should have been saved.

The strength her hand possessed as it held Fourier’s had vanished, and a shadow came over her face.

Remorse, that was all she felt.

Leip: “—Concerning that, there is something I must tell everyone.”

Bordeaux: “...Yes, what is it?”

Leip: “I did not mention this at first for a good reason, and I hope that everyone will be well-aware of it soon. Please listen carefully.”

Bordeaux: “Clearly state what you want to say!”

Leip: “The prophecy that appeared in the Dragon History Stone did so before His Majesty passed away.”

Bordeaux was stunned by Leip’s words.

But that reaction was not limited to Bordeaux. Every aristocrats seated at the parliament, watching over the exchange, opened their mouths in shock.

Crusch was also lost for words. She fixed Leip with a look of disgust.

Leip: “Everyone must be wondering why I kept silent, so let me first clarify that I have not turned my back on His Majesty.”

Bordeaux: “You bastard, have you forgotten your duty? Not only have you forgotten to fulfill your duty, you brazenly say it! To neglect to mention the guidance of the Kingdom engraved on the Dragon History Stone...!”

???: “Did the content of the Dragon History Stone implicitly suggest that His Majesty and his family would all pass away?”

Bordeaux: “What...!?”

Crusch exhaled sharply as that bomb was dropped on the conversation. Bordeaux, face severely reddening, turned to search for the source of those words. When,

Miklotov: “Hmm... Bordeaux-sama seems to have calmed down a little. Leip-sama, can you discuss this in greater detail?”

Leip: “As you will.”

The old man who had interrupted Bordeaux stroked his long, white beard.

The representative of Council of Wise Men, Miklotov, kept a calm composure as he prompted a change in the course of the conversation.

Leip: “Ten days ago, when His Majesty was still alive, was when I first found the prophecy... I should have consulted with His Majesty, or with the assembled Lords... but instead I kept this knowledge to myself at my own discretion.”

Miklotov: “Hmm... Why did you do so?”

Leip: “The prophecy was as follows— «When the Royal Family’s line ends, the Kingdom shall find five candidates, chosen by an emblem, to tie a new Covenant as a Dragon Shrine Maiden». I did not have the heart to tell this to His Majesty while he was on his deathbed.

Aristocrats: “...What?”

Hearing Leip’s words, the senior aristocrats all sighed.

What a cruel prophecy. To tell the desperately struggling Royal Family and aristocrats that the disease could not be cured, to kill off all hope. Leip’s feelings, in this case, could not be dismissed.

Aristocrat: “The Dragon History Stone... Not existing royalty, but a new Ruler? What do you mean by five people?”

Leip: “There is an Insignia. A jewel that has been handed down by the Royal Family of Lugunica, informing them about the Covenant with the Dragon. At of the moment of His Majesty’s demise, and the bloodline of the Royal Family ended, it lost its light, but... It will shine brightly in the hands of a new, worthy person.”

Aristocrat: “You want us to find five people... who can make this insignia shine!? Preposterous! It will not be possible to determine who shall sit on the throne in such a way!”

Leip: “So you will ignore the writ!? If we cannot select a Shrine Maiden capable of bearing the Covenant, the history of Lugunica will end here! And the same is true of its bond with the Dragon!”²¹²”

Those who attempted to deny this were met with Leip’s fierce words. Those who refuted him with their common sense were all forced to keep their mouths shut.

Crusch: “Would you mind if I speak?”

Leip: “Please, do you have any opinions you would like to share, Karsten-kyo?”

Crusch: “It is nothing that important. It is only natural that negative opinions arise, but first we should determine the accuracy of the writ. Could you bring out these Insignias?”

Leip: “I have prepared one for this moment. Bring it.”

Nodding to Crusch’s words, Leip gave a signal, and the doors of the parliament opened. Some servants wheeled in a cart, the Insignia of the Royal Family of Lugunica on top. Priority was given to those with strong ties to the Royal Family, such as the Royal Knights.

A black triangular stone, with a dragon carved on it in gold. and a red gem in the center. Before the Royal Family died, the red gem would always shine as a sign of the Royal Family’s prestige, but now it grew dim in the face of the King’s demise.

Aristocrat: “It will happen when this thing glows again, correct?”

Leip: “That is correct. If you have what it takes.”

The Insignia in the hands of the servants, each person surrounding the round table was lined up. Some were washed by cold sweat, others’ breaths were taken away, all as they looked down upon the Insignia.

If it shone while held by one’s hands, it would mean that person would have opened the way to the throne. Some cracked under that burden, others cracked due to their modest ambition.

²¹² The expression used is “盟約に耐え得る巫女が選り出せねば”. An alternative wording may be “Shrine Maiden capable of withstanding the Covenant”, which really makes it not seem like the nicest of things.

Aristocrat: “What about Baron Leip?”

Leip: “If I were to make the Insignia shine after having withheld the information about the prophecy, it would only invite suspicion. The Stone would never have chosen something that would cause such discord.”

Leip shook his head at the question, but to what extent was that a serious denial?

Snorting, Bordeaux took the initiative to pick up the Insignia; however, its glow remained non-existent. The insignia, apparently, had not chosen him.

Other members of the Council of Wise Men, including Miklotov, also picked it up, held it in their hands, and shook their heads. As time went on, everyone seated at the round table picked up the insignia, and faint gasps and small sighs spilled out, one after the other.

But then...

Miklotov: “...What?”

A rare look of surprise on his usually calm face, the first to speak was Miklotov. However, that must have been a reflection of the feelings of everyone who had gathered upon this place.

The dazzling brilliance of the Insignia made Crusch look at her own palm, and nod.

Crusch: “Apparently, even those who are unworthy can do something for the Kingdom as well.”

Saying so with surprising calmness, Crusch held out her palm, raised her head, and closed her eyes. And looked upwards.

With her eyes closed, she felt that she could see Fourier’s last smile.

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—There was subsequent confusion over Crusch’s position. Thanks to the prophecy of Dragon History Stone, to Crusch’s existence, the contents of Leip’s words were proven real.

And thanks to this, she was now not only a Duchess, but a provisional candidate for the throne, which bestowed her significantly more power in parliament. And,

Ferris: “From the first time Ferri saw Crusch-sama, Ferri thought she would be destined for something much greater than just a statesman!”

Having heard of Crusch’s new position, Ferris clearly felt a great amount of joy, which Crusch had not even associated with her circumstances until now.

Ferris: “Crusch-sama, why are you stroking my head? I’m happy, really happy, but my ears are really weak!”

Crusch: “You always serve me loyally. From now on, I’ll be asking even more from you.”

Ferris: “Yes, understood. Ferri is more and more captivated by Crusch-sama with each passing day.”

Crusch’s praise made Ferris blush and his tail swayed from side-to-side. Then his expression sobered slightly.

Ferris: “So, what is Crusch-sama’s position now?”

Crusch: “I will be a provisional candidate for the throne. There are four other candidates who are yet to be found. If I win, I will become a Shrine Maiden for the dragon.”

Ferris: “But even with a prophecy from the Dragon History Stone, how much of that absurd story can you believe? Although you’ll have a chance to confirm it with the Dragon.”

Crusch: “Bordeaux-sama also has some feelings of suspicion. He thinks that this may be a story concocted by Leip Barielle... I, too, am a little concerned about Leip-sama’s attitude. And, Margrave Mathers was also suspiciously quiet.”

The eccentric Roswaal L. Mathers had also been in attendance at the parliament meeting, dressed in his typical clownish makeup and outfit. Crusch found it curious that someone who rarely attended important discussions on the affairs of the Kingdom had been so intensely interested in the Royal Selection, and that, furthermore, he had not acted upon his interest.

Crusch: “Either way, pondering upon too many unanswerable questions is a waste of time. There is nothing that I nor Bordeaux-sama can do regarding Leip-sama. And I’m sure that I look suspicious as well.”

Ferris: “Hmph. Are there really such ungrateful people who would suspect Crusch-sama?”

Crusch: “Even I found my timing in that incident more suspicious than just a coincidence. I could not have predicted the situation.”

Ferris: “But even with the timing, hadn’t Crusch-sama considered that she might be a candidate at all?”

In reply to Ferris, Crusch smiled bitterly. Ferris truly knew her heart better than she knew it herself.

Crusch recalled the emotions she had felt during that meeting. When Leip mentioned the Dragon History Stone, Crusch was just as surprised as anyone else. She had agreed with Bordeaux’s argument, and had felt anger at Leip’s reply.

But when asked to try the Royal Insignia, Crusch had done so without hesitation. And upon sighting the red gem of the Insignia shining so brilliantly, Crusch had felt no trace of surprise. There was only the sound of the Wind blowing from her soul.

—She had finally been given the opportunity.

Fourier’s wishes, his hopes for the kingdom, which he had told only her. She had found the opportunity to answer to them. To have Fourier’s death become a sacrifice, to let his demise be a steppingstone to fulfilling his dreams.

Crusch Karsten calmly accepted this opportunity.

And this very opportunity had presented her with an answer to another problem that had been plaguing her.

Crusch: “Ferris, I have a favor to ask.”

Ferris: “I have already confirmed his location. I will be sure to transmit Crusch’s message.”

Ferris had immediately understood Crusch's intent. Seeing this, Crusch smiled a slightly bitter smile, and expression that was already becoming familiar.

Crusch: "Summon the Sword Demon— We shall have a discussion at the estate."

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Wilhelm: "To be summoned like this, I cannot help but feel slight trepidation."

Wilhelm, kneeling and offering the most respectful salute, had been personally invited and received by Crusch. They met in the reception room of the Karsten Estate.

Crusch: "You do not seem to have changed much since the last time I saw you."

Wilhelm: "Indeed, Karsten-kyo also seems to be in the same state of well-being as last time."

During their social routine, the two surveyed each other carefully. Crusch's investigations had told her that since their previous meeting, Wilhelm's actions had been fruitless, and had fully been expecting him to accept this invitation.

Ferris: "It seems that neither party is engaging in dialogue."

Wilhelm: "«I will be hearing the truth today», is what your messenger told me, so I would appreciate it if you would directly discuss the main topic today."

His gaze turned slightly to Ferris, who was standing next to Crusch, holding her wrist. Today, Ferris was wearing a short dress, through which his tail extended.

Cunning, but skilled at prompting discussion, a skill that benefitted a member of the nobility. Better than herself, at the very least. Crusch gave this mental evaluation of Ferris. Setting that thought aside,

Crusch: "The «truth» being referred to is the reason why Bordeaux was unable to assist you in subjugating the White Whale."

Wilhelm: “Indeed, no matter who I ask, I never receive a straight answer. What on earth is so grave that no one is willing to say it? Please inform me.”

Crusch: “Once you know, there is no going back. Knowing this, do you still want the answer?”

Wilhelm: “If this is an obstacle in my quest for the vengeance of my wife, I will overcome it.”

Steel’s nature was one never to bend.

Hearing Wilhelm’s reply, Crusch exhaled deeply.

It was the answer she had been expecting, as well as the answer she had been hoping to hear. But giving a reply was difficult.

What Crusch was about to discuss was information that could only be disclosed to a limited number of people in the Kingdom. Leaking it to Wilhelm, an exile from the house of the Sword Saint, was not something that could be done lightly.

She braced herself and revealed her information in one beat. But that was all it took.

Crusch: “His Majesty Randohal has passed away.”

Wilhelm: “———!”

Wilhelm’s eyes widened, and his expression became one of understanding. But the surprise was not over.

Crusch: “It is not just His Majesty. The entire bloodline of the ancient Royal Family of Lugunica has come to an end.”

Wilhelm: “Absurd! Such a thing cannot happen!”

The kneeling Wilhelm looked up, bared his teeth, and raised his voice. Those words were far too absurd and had brought fury to the old man. It was completely expected, after all Wilhelm—

Crusch: “Is it a shock to you, one who formerly led the Royal Knights of Lugunica?”

Wilhelm: “...”

Crusch: “This is the truth of the matter. His Majesty and his relatives were struck down by an illness which seemed to affect the blood of the Royal Family solely. Although the best healers in the country were summoned, the Royal Family did not survive.”

Wilhelm: “The entire Royal Family... Their bloodline has been disrupted... such a thing, how could it possibly...?”

Wilhelm fell shakily onto his hands as Crusch made the cold announcement. In truth, he understood.

The abrupt change in Bordeaux and the reason why no one would hear his appeal. Something major, something affecting the very existence of the Kingdom— something enough to turn even the White Whale into a mere triviality.

But Wilhelm’s anger was not shallow enough for him to be able to discard it.

But to whom did he hold this anger toward? Where should he direct it? What should he do about it? Even Wilhelm did not know, and so he pushed a fist against the floor and attempted to stifle it. The fist on the floor trembled, the floor cracked, and his blood flowed. He closed his eyes and bit his lip, trying to summon the last bit of reserve he had left.

But this could not be.

This should not be.

Crusch: “This is not the place that you should be directing your anger toward.”

Wilhelm: “—What...”

Crusch: “Your situation has not changed, except that the clouds have cleared and that you have found your answer. Now that you know the answer, what are your thoughts?”

Wilhelm: “There is no need to humiliate me further. You... What do you understand...!?”

Crusch: “I certainly do not understand anything, and I do not have the capability to even try. Currently, I am merely attempting to insert myself into a story whose characters I admire, who are on the verge of resigning themselves and stopping.”

Wilhelm's still contained fury, however, the fire had died down slightly. Because it was a fleeting, swaying flame, one which had lost sight of a future. It was far from the intense flame Crusch wanted to see, but it was a flame, nonetheless.

Crusch: "I told you, Wilhelm. After hearing the truth, there is no turning back. This is a matter concerning the future of the kingdom, and you are now just an old tree of an experienced swordsmen."

Wilhelm: "...And why do you want to belittle this dying, weathered tree?"

Crusch: "No, you misunderstand me, Wilhelm. What I want from you is just one answer. It is your turn to answer. I have been asking you from the beginning, first the encounter in the prison, and now here. Even if we meet again, I will continue posing the same initial question."

Wilhelm: "-----"

Crusch: "Wilhelm Trias— Are you truly okay with the way this affair will develop?"

A sigh of relief.

The old man's eyes, which had fallen into a murky depression, shot open. In there, was a blue that reflected the sky.

Crusch nodded.

Crusch: "In front of you, is the Duchess who is currently one of the most important people in the Kingdom. Prior to this, the senior aristocrats who could lend a hand to you denied you, and those who were willing to assist could not provide the necessary strength to defeat the Whale. Others who could assist would choose to use the subjugation as an excuse for personal gain."

Wilhelm: "You... What, exactly, are you trying to say...?"

Crusch: "It's the same question I have asked you, and I will keep asking. Other than the answer to this question, between the two of us, there is nothing more to discuss."

Wilhelm: "..."

Wilhelm fell silent and tried to look deep into Crusch's heart.

But, Crusch's heart was not something that Wilhelm could see through. Even Crusch herself had difficulty adequately expressing what she felt. Perhaps, Ferris was the only one who could see through her.

And that Ferris, ignoring the heat between Crusch and Wilhelm, leaned closer into Crusch, his face showing no sign of worry or anxiety. Because he knew that his role was, above all, to provide Crusch with support. And Crusch, perhaps more than anyone else, understood Ferris and what actions meant.

Therefore, Crusch Karsten continued to question Wilhelm relentlessly.

Crusch: "Wilhelm. Shall you continue like this, soon your path will be cut off. And, with that path, your quest for vengeance on the Witchbeast cannot be fulfilled. And you will continue to waste away."

Wilhelm: "...You are willing to lend me a chance to continue to swing my sword?"

Crusch: "I will say it again. Wilhelm, the one posing the question is me. The one who must answer is you."

Wilhelm: "-----"

Crossing her arms, Crusch threw those words at him. Hearing them, Wilhelm exhaled deeply and closed his eyes.

Then he fixed his posture, adjusted his pose on the spot, and opened his eyes.

The blue flame dwelling in his eyes caused Crusch to tremble unconsciously.

Wilhelm: "—In slaying the White Whale that killed my wife, I would like you to lend me your power."

Crusch: "...I am just the same as the senior aristocrats that refused all your proposals. Why appeal to me?"

Wilhelm: "Duchess Karsten, can you forgive the White Whale and allow it to continue to wreak havoc upon Lugunica?"

Crusch: "I will not forgive it. Certainly, I could never forgive such cruelty, such barbarity, such violence, such ruthlessness. But—"

Pausing, Crusch gazed at Wilhelm and closed her eyes.

Crusch: “What I find most unforgivable is that the existence of the White Whale made so many people change their way of living. Unable to be themselves and act as their soul desires, their souls are defiled and become dim... That is what I find unforgivable. So, Wilhelm. What I cannot forgive today is your attitude.”

Wilhelm: “...I am a most unworthy figure, aren't I?”

Crusch: “Yes, unworthy. I cannot bear to look at you. Such humiliation is not something that should be experienced. Therefore, the man-eating fiend causing it is also unforgivable.”

Wilhelm: “———”

Wilhelm raised his gaze to meet Crusch's eyes. Crusch unflinchingly faced his sharp, piercing gaze.

Crossing gazes, the two simultaneously relaxed their mouths, and smiled as one.

Wilhelm: “What will you ask of this weathered, old tree, my Lord?”

Crusch: “It has been decided. All I wish to see is true, bright, unashamed soul of the Sword Demon, Wilhelm van Astrea. There is little aside from that.”

Wilhelm: “I cast off the title Sword Demon and the house Astrea a long time ago. As long as the White Whale lives, I do not intend to reclaim either of them.”

Crusch: “Then, allow me to prepare the victory ceremony for you. We will one day recover your name, Wilhelm.”

Wilhelm: “—Yes.”

He nodded solemnly as a response to Crusch's words and accepted them. Seeing his gesture, Crusch nodded, satisfied, and approached Wilhelm, detaching the sword that hung at her waist.

Crusch: “Receive it.”

Wilhelm received the sword as if it were natural, and unsheathed it in a single smooth flowing motion. Turning it around, the sword was presented to Crusch. Upon receiving it, Crusch moved it to lightly touch Wilhelm's left shoulder with its tip, then repeated the motion on his right shoulder.

Crusch: "I hold only one expectation toward you, Wilhelm. As long as you live up to it, all will be well."

Wilhelm: "My sword shall be devoted to you. My body shall be indebted to you. My own soul shall make an Oath to you."

Crusch: "—Mhm. That is good."

In response to that oath, Crusch pulled the blade, and held it out in front of Wilhelm. Presenting the sword to Wilhelm again, Wilhelm received it, sheathing it back into its scabbard, and raised it in reverence. They nod at each other in understanding.

Crusch: "Keep this sword. As a swordsman, holding a sword is necessary, no?"

Wilhelm: "But..."

Crusch: "I want to see you wielding this sword, with the attitude of a swordsman."

In the face of Crusch's expectation, Wilhelm blinked and stood. Then, the tall old man with that treasured sword bowed to Crusch, attached his new sword to his waist, and straightened up.

In that moment, Crusch felt her previous state of confusion and anxiety blow away.

—Here, the Oath between the Duchess and the swordsman was made.

To fulfill Wilhelm's wish and to fulfill Fourier's dreams. If the heavens had chosen Crusch Karsten for this task, she would live up to their will.

To follow the guidance of one's soul and to act the way it was desired. In this regard, Crusch would take up all that she could carry and stride toward a tranquil, cherished, distant future.

—On this day, the Sword Demon found his greatest ally in his quest to subjugate the White Whale.

This was the real beginning of the unity of Royal Selection's Crusch Camp.

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Ferris: “Ahhhhh~, seeing you two would make anyone jealous.”

Wilhelm, who had found a path to fulfilling his ambition, and Crusch, who had established a connection with the one she had admired so much. Seeing how the two had laid down their worries and were now embracing in joy, Ferris bounced on his heels.

Ferris: “Crusch-sama jumped into the main topic way too quickly.”

Originally, Crusch had meant to first relay the story of the King’s death, before denouncing the White Whale and finally persuading Wilhelm to join the camp.

Even so, a fiery passion had entered Crusch, and she had jumped straight into recruiting Wilhelm. Although Wilhelm’s blindness worked in their advantage, Ferris’s heart was pounding like he had just successfully walked off a tightrope. He did not want to see a despondent Crusch-sama who had failed in her task, especially since the one she had been trying to recruit was the Sword Demon who she had admired so much.

Ferris: “Crusch-sama really does make people anxious... But, that’s also a very moving quality.”

Becoming a Royal Candidate and aiming to garner support by hunting the White Whale. Ignoring the preliminaries of conversation and immediately bringing up the main topic, Crusch had been clearly eager to free Wilhelm, in turn clouded by his frustration and desire for revenge.

Ferris, too, would stand by their side and support them through their hunt. He too was well-aware of what the White Whale had done to so many families, and as one of the country’s leading healers, Ferris believed in removing as much weakness as possible in the Kingdom.

Ferris: “Seeing this charming Crusch-sama, Ferri doesn’t want to take his eyes off her for even a second.”

Quietly narrowing his calm yellow eyes, Ferris regarded the old man who had just shed away a heavy burden and gained the weight of Crusch’s expectations.

A person who Crusch had taken a personal interest in. What would happen if he betrayed her expectations?

Ferris: “There are some things that I dislike thinking about.”

The young man’s words were so quiet that they dissipated in the wind before they could reach anyone’s ears.

—Six months after that evening, when the Royal Selection was well under way, the dream of the subjugation of the White Whale became a reality.

Character Pages for Volume 15

Characters

Re: Life in a different world
from zero

Characters

Re: Life in a different world
from zero

The only ability I got in a different world "Returns by Death"
I die again and again to save her.

カーミラ

Carmilla

『色欲』の魔女。明るい桃色の髪を
腰まで伸ばし、ゆるく纏めている。
伏し目がちでおどおどとした印象の美少女。



メイリィ

Meili

魔獣使い。黒を基調とした衣装で
全身を固めている。



Extra Information for Arc 4 Chapters 125B and 126B

???: “Hate, hate, absolutely hate you. Me, I loathe you. I really do. All of it is entirely true. Ever since we first met... I’ve downright hated you.”

Emilia: “———!?”

Immediately following the voice, a vivid scene slipped into Emilia’s perception. Beneath an overwhelmingly giant sun, in a burnt field, standing beside a massive and dilapidated building, bathed in crimson sunlight, was a girl with blood wetting her silver hair— Emilia.

It was her fully-grown self, who she had only witnessed in the Second Trial.

And she looked woeful as she stood before the ruin, assaulting someone with her words.

Emilia: “I’ve had this thought countless times, and denied it countless times, but... Yes, a nightmare really did catch up to me. And so, I will say it.”

Emilia: “———”

Emilia: “Maybe we really shouldn’t have met after all.”

A tear streamed down from the corner of her amethyst eye. It trailed down to her cheek, fell from her chin, and the instant before it struck the ground, the world burst into nothing.

Emilia is certain, as her name is literally given in narration. The target of her speech is completely unknown.

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???: “You’re absolutely right. That kid was our enemy, and our wounds were deep. If we withdrew here, considering that neither of us can heal, maybe we wouldn’t have been saved.”

???: “In that case...”

???: “But they were just a kid— And isn’t that enough?”

Again, the scene changed. Now she witnessed a thick forest, two people standing at the edge of a steep cliff. She could not see their faces. But she knew both of their voices. One was very familiar, and though the other one was not, she did remember it.

The two were facing off before that cliff, one of them kneeling, the other looking down at the kneeling party. Emilia felt like both looked horribly miserable.

???: “You... You are a hero. A hero... is all, you can ever be!”

???: “I...”

???: “Why thank you so very much for your help!”

One silhouette reached their hand out to the other, who turned their face away and left those inconsiderate words of gratitude.

It felt like it had been a definite farewell between these two people. A goodbye laced with only irreparable woe and disappointment.

The world began fading away again, and Emilia’s consciousness returned to the dark space.

It is unknown if these two scenes are one future alone, but I certainly see them as such.

From narration, one of them is very familiar to Emilia, and uses the pronoun "ore" (俺), indicating this person is most certainly Subaru speaking. Other "ore"-users are unlikely, but it could be Puck as he uses it once in the WN in special circumstances, or Al, albeit the written form of his usual “ore” pronoun is written in Katakana (オレ).

The target of this speech is most certainly Reinhard (being called a hero is kinda his schtick), and the pronoun matches up as well with Reinhard's usual "boku" (僕).

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???: *“—Without that, do you not have even a sword to swing. Thief!!”*

Speaker is completely unknown. WN Arc 4 translator proposed Wilhelm due to the use of "他", for some reason.

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???: *“Witness. The victor remains I.”*

Speaker is arrogant as fuck. Most likely Priscilla.

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???: *“Subaru, Emilia-neesama, I know you must be so tired. I’m sorry. But I’m going to wind up being a burden too. I’m sorry. All the thanks I’d wanted to say could never be enough...”*

Talks to both Subaru and Emilia, calling Emilia "neesama", indicating that it is a young person. SummaryAnon added that it may also sound feminine. Very likely Petra.

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???: *"To think that someone I wanted to kill so much was actually a kind person, what an incredible nightmare."*

Pronouns are not present, but SummaryAnon denotes it is a feminine speaker. One of the main possibilities is Ram.

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???: *"There are feelings which must not be spoken. Does it satisfy you, now that they have come to light?"*


It is unclear who spoke those feelings, or who is the target of the line in the LN: is it talking about someone else, or themselves? Anyway, SummaryAnon put this as extremely difficult to tell, but possibly Julius as the person talking is masculine.

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???: *"Does this make you feel that you have seen your promise through? If it does... If it does, then I was better off bound and dead in that cave! If I was going to see this dawn, then I should have just offed myself sooner...! Damnit, damnit!"*

From circumstances, it is pretty obvious this is Otto. For the kicker, this line features his usual pronoun, "boku" (僕).

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???: “God I’m sorry. I’m sorry for being so weak. God I’m sorry. I could not make the kill, god I’m sorry. Now  will always be alone forever. God I’m sorry for being so weak...”

Uses "ore" (俺), Subaru being its most frequent user. Other "ore"-users are unlikely, but it could be Puck as he uses it once in the WN in special circumstances, or Al, albeit the written form of his usual “ore” pronoun is written in Katakana (オレ).

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???: “Yes, yes... my dear grandchild... must’ve grown up well...”

Uses "washi" (儼). The Japanese for “grandchild” is gender-neutral (孫). With these two factors in mind, it is most certainly Rom or Ryuzu.

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???: “I shall never perish to such nonsense as a curse!”

One of the most difficult "future lines". The target of the curse is vague, and hard to discern from the Japanese. The WN Arc 4 translator states that it could also be translated as “You must not perish to such nonsense as a curse!”, and denotes the speaker speaks in a somewhat formal fashion. Given speaking patterns, this may be Wilhelm, Crusch or Julius.

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???: *"It's simply that I realized something. That along the path up to today, I haaaaaaaaaad not been walking alone."*

Extends his vowels, so it is most likely Roswaal. The only other character with a similar tic is Hector.

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???: *"How come there is no soul inside!?"*

Considering the talk about souls, and that the speaker sounds somewhat feminine or at the very least has a way of speech typical of young people, evidenced by the use of "のぉ", this is probably Felix, which is in line with SummaryAnon's proposal. Some have proposed Beatrice, which sounds unlikely considering her vocal tics are completely absent, "kashira" (からね) and "noyo" (のよ).

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???: *"Just as promised, I'm fuckin' killin' ya! Yeh!?? NATSUKI SUBARUUUUUUUU!!"*

Neither SummaryAnon (nor I) can really deny the speaker is Garfiel, given he speaks like a goddamn redneck.

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???: *“Am I being so covetous? Am I saying anythin’ that indulgent? Nobody dies, nobody weeps. What’s so complicated ’bout it?”*

Hard to tell. Being "covetous" or "greedy" sounds like it is Anastasia, and SummaryAnon put this down as Anastasia, possibly due to the use of Kararagi/Kansai dialect. It is also possible that it is not the speaker being greedy, but the one the speaker is talking to, but that is highly unlikely.

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???: *“After all, we must bleed ourselves to our very last drop to redeem ourselves, yes?”*

Uses "watakushi" (わたくし), which is very rare. Famous users are Frederica, Annerose and Crusch, all of which speak formally much like what’s happening in this line. However, this is written in Hiragana, which makes Frederica and Annerose the most likely options, as Crusch is usually written using the Kanji form (私, same as “watashi”).

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???: *“Right and wrong and good and evil’s all a bunch of bullshit. You’re stopping right there. Say it’s the Dragon or say it’s the Witch, if anyone’s blocking the way then I’m... then we’re, gonna crush them.”*

This line is vague as fuck in Japanese, but this is its general sense. The use of "atashi" (アタシ) as pronoun, and particularly in Katakana, indicates that the most likely option is Felt.

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???: “—I believe that to pray for one’s requests is arrogance. Prayers are for when you seek forgiveness.”

—In the final world of light, a girl that Emilia had never seen awake and speaking talked.

From simple context, this is most certainly Rem without a shadow of a doubt. As a fun fact, the Kanji translated as “arrogance” is the same one used for the sin of Pride, in Re: Zero (傲慢).

Other Volumes

Main Story (Root folder at <https://bit.ly/3sUbM1t>)

- Arc 1 (Single volume):
 - Volume 1 - <https://bit.ly/3ilbMNw>;
- Arc 4 (Full arc at <https://bit.ly/311w8te>):
 - Volume 10 - <https://bit.ly/3qlw5NF>;
 - Volume 11 - <https://bit.ly/3iDFa7E>;
 - Volume 12 - <https://bit.ly/399hQeP>;
 - Volume 13 - <https://bit.ly/3pf1Ayi>;
 - Volume 14 - <https://bit.ly/39VSpwt>;
 - Volume 15 - <https://bit.ly/367hfIN>.
- Arc 5 (Full arc at <https://bit.ly/2P9kc5Z>):
 - Volume 16 - <https://bit.ly/3pbWovm>;
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 - Volume 18 - <https://bit.ly/2MjEEj6>;
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 - Volume 20 - <https://bit.ly/3qJn1be>.
- Arc 6 (Full arc at <https://bit.ly/38X9re4>):
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 - Volume 23 - <https://bit.ly/3pjBZEM>;
 - Volume 24 - <https://bit.ly/39caJ5p>;
 - Volume 25 - <https://bit.ly/3c2zkeN>.
- Arc 7 (Full arc at <https://bit.ly/3s4Tj1D>):
 - Volume 26 - <https://bit.ly/2MjN6il>;
 - Volume 27 - <https://bit.ly/3c6OgYx>;
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Side Content (Root folder at <https://bit.ly/39bjoop>)

- **Side Stories:**
 - **Heroic Tale from Zero** (Arc 2 spoilers) - <https://bit.ly/3zcuaVZ>;
 - **Oni Sisters of the Hidden Village EX** (Arc 4 spoilers) - <https://bit.ly/3ySWRa2>;
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